PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1998–99

COMPRISING PERIOD
13 April—23 April 1999

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13 April 1999

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 329**

SEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1998–99

House of Commons

Tuesday 13 April 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Builders

1. **Mr. John Healey** (Wentworth): What plans he has to take action against incompetent and dishonest builders; and if he will make a statement. [78815]

The Minister for London and Construction (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The Government are determined to combat the scourge of cowboy builders, who cause immense misery and serious problems for thousands of consumers and damage the image of the whole construction industry. Our work has taken another major step forward in the last week with the cowboy working group's interim report, which sets out detailed proposals for a practical quality mark and approved-list scheme which was issued for consultation on Friday.

Mr. Healey: I thank my hon. Friend for confirmation of the plans for the quality mark scheme, which was well received by reputable builders to whom I spoke in my constituency over the weekend, and which promises a way to deal with the cowboys who rip people off with overpriced, shoddy and sometimes unsafe work. Will my hon. Friend give a little more detail of how the scheme will encourage the best and root out the worst? If this voluntary scheme fails, will he undertake to legislate?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The scheme has been widely welcomed by reputable builders who recognise the damage being done to their reputation by the unscrupulous. The quality mark scheme is based on simple principles: builders who subscribe to it must meet guaranteed standards of quality performance and be subject to proper procedures for complaint handling and to disciplinary procedures, and their work must be underpinned by performance and insurance-backed warranties. That assures customers that when they select a builder with the quality mark, they will get a reputable builder, with proper channels of redress if things go wrong and that they will not fall into the hands of unscrupulous cowboys.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): One of the companies in my constituency of which I am particularly proud is Exor Management Services, which has set up the Sinclair vetting directory, which is similar to what the Government are seeking to do. The firm points out that vetting is good only on the day of publication of the list. It suggests that one way to improve the Government scheme would be to introduce continuous vetting, so that someone does not get through the net by being good at just one particular point. Will the Minister agree to his officials meeting my constituent company, as its proposal might avoid duplication and might even save the Government some money?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly fair point. There is a need for continuous monitoring of builders' performance to ensure the integrity of the quality

mark scheme. He is right to say that the views of the industry should be taken into account, which is why the report has been published for consultation. We shall welcome the views of the hon. Gentleman's constituent firm and others during the consultation period, with the aim of getting the scheme as good as it possibly can be when we come to launch it, we hope in the autumn.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): May I bring to my hon. Friend the Minister's attention the activities of a company operating in my constituency? Formerly known as Midland Coating, it went into liquidation and subsequently reinvented itself as Raincheck. That company also went into liquidation and recently reinvented itself as Sealpoint. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that he will discuss the activities of this and similar phoenix companies with colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry who are well aware of the problem, with a view to taking action so that companies cannot simply reinvent themselves with a different name and continue their unscrupulous activities?

Mr. Raynsford: We are in close contact with colleagues at the DTI on broader consumer protection issues, including effective measures to be taken against rogue traders. I certainly hope that they will be able to come up with proposals to make it easier to deal with the kind of problems created by the firms to which my hon. Friend refers. The important point about the quality mark scheme is that it will give customers knowledge of reputable firms which meet approved standards; and firms such as those to which my hon. Friend refers will not qualify for the quality mark, so any customers who use them will do so at their own risk.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): The Minister's announcement is certainly welcome, although some eyebrows have been raised over the membership of the cowboy working party. Does he accept that many of the problems are created by door-to-door building salesmen, especially those in the double glazing industry? Will he assure us that such people will be brought within the scope of the working party's examination? Does he accept that if he were to extend the Energy Saving Trust's scheme, which provides help for poor and low-income families to install energy-saving and energy-efficient equipment in their homes, that would cut off that part of the industry, thus providing good value for the Government and reducing CO_2 emissions?

Mr. Raynsford: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should have impugned the integrity of the members of the cowboy working party, which is led in a distinguished way by Tony Merricks and which has produced a report that has received widespread support and encouragement from the construction industry. The hon. Gentleman's proposals are slightly odd, given that we have increased the sums available for the home energy efficiency and home agency schemes the HEES and HIA schemes. However, that does not obviate the need for a proper scheme to ensure that any member of the public who is approached by a door-to-door salesman, or by any other builder or person masquerading as a builder, should be able to gauge whether that person is reputable. The quality mark scheme that we propose to introduce will provide exactly that guarantee.

Rail Transport

2. **Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): What is his most recent estimate of the amount of goods transported by rail in 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [78816]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): The Department's figures for the financial year 1997–98—the last full year for which we have figures—show a 12 per cent. growth in freight carried by rail. That growth continues. In the first half of the financial year 1998–99—April 1998 to September 1998—8.9 billion tonne km of freight went by rail compared with 8.3 billion tonne km over the same period in the financial year 1997–98. That shows an extraordinary increase in the growth of rail freight.

Mr. Khabra: I welcome the Minister's reply, but what steps is the Department taking to encourage, where possible, companies to use rail instead of road to transport goods? Does he agree that a reduction in the use of roads will help to improve air quality as well as the environment generally?

Mr. Prescott: It is our intention, as we pointed out in the White Paper on integrated transport, to achieve a sustainable freight system for air, sea, ship, rail and road. We have outlined some of the policies for that. One of the first things that we did was almost to double the amount of freight grants that were available. We have increased that amount again, and it is being fully used. We have also made grants available to freight integration centres and are improving port facilities. All that has led to the increase, and we look to a further one.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the welcome increases in rail freight can continue only if there is continuing public support for such increases? In constituencies such as mine, densely populated residential areas are being badly affected by vibration and noise from particular flows of freight. That is undermining public support for greater use of rail freight, which is very bad. In October, I raised this subject with the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). Will he undertake to have another look at rail freight going to the Brunner Mond plant in Cheshire?

Mr. Prescott: I always talk to my colleagues about these matters. Any transport matter has environmental consequences, whether it be noise or exhaust emissions. Those are a matter of concern in our comprehensive approach. I am pleased at the growth in rail traffic, which has also occurred through the channel tunnel—much of it due to the changes that we have made in policy. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is due to privatisation."] As for those who shout about privatisation, it was an absolute scandal to give away rail companies and pay £250 million, not for those companies but for their bonus of free travel through the channel tunnel.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Government's

excellent work to encourage the transport of freight by rail will be undermined if Railtrack is not prepared to put money into the pinch-points in the railway system that are holding up the movement of goods? Will he take it on himself to have a short, straightforward, Anglo Saxon conversation with the chief executive of Railtrack about the difference between wish-lists, supported by even more Government money, and investment programmes that could be funded by Railtrack's very large profits?

Mr. Prescott: Investment is indeed the key. There is not sufficient rail capacity to meet the increasing demands of freight. That is why we have ordered a look at the new rail route to take international carriages, and why we have renegotiated arrangements, which collapsed under the previous Administration, for the channel tunnel rail link. I very much agree with my hon. Friend about wish-lists for investment. As she knows, I have appointed a pretty tough Strategic Rail Authority chairman and a new regulator, who I believe will begin to make a difference in Railtrack's approach to delivering its promises.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Does the Secretary of State agree that we should be doing everything possible to help Railtrack deliver its £27 billion investment programme, which would be the biggest ever investment programme in the railways and the biggest ever investment by a United Kingdom private company? To that end, would not it be sensible to drop the proposal to divert the subsidy from the train operating companies to Railtrack, which exists only to give the Deputy Prime Minister political leverage that he does not require? Precisely who supports his proposal for changing the subsidy arrangements? Does his new rail supremo, Sir Alastair Morton, whose appointment we very much welcome, support the proposal or, like the rest of the industry, does he think that it is absolutely crazy and will endanger the investment that Railtrack is offering?

Mr. Prescott: It is very difficult to keep up with the Opposition. I read a statement attributed to the hon. Gentleman that he was claiming the idea himself. I was the one who asked the regulator to review the subsidies being given to the franchise operators and to consider whether those subsidies should be given to Railtrack because of the failure to invest in the infrastructure, which my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) mentioned. I made the reference to the regulator and I believe that his report will be out in the next few days.

Mr. Jenkin: Who supports it?

Mr. Prescott: I believe that there is considerable support. If the hon. Gentleman reads the Booz Allen report, commissioned by the regulator, which has been published, he will see that we are the ones who are making common sense about the railway system.

Bus Passes (Pensioners)

3. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will make a statement concerning progress in implementing the policy of making available half-fare bus passes for all pensioners. [78817]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): We intend to legislate to make half-fare bus passes available to all pensioners as soon as parliamentary time permits. It is of course open to individual local authorities to adopt the proposed minimum standard in advance of legislation.

Mr. Grogan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he recognise the urgency of the matter and the priority with which many in rural Britain treat this issue, especially in my constituency, where, for example, in market towns such as Tadcaster and villages such as Sherburn-in-Elmet, pensioners have to make do with only £8 a year of bus tokens—enough for three or four journeys a year—in the knowledge that their neighbours in West Yorkshire, in towns such as Weatherby, have access to concessionary travel at 20p per journey off peak? Is not that fundamentally unfair?

Dr. Reid: I agree with my hon. Friend that any Government committed, as the Government are, to a fairer, more inclusive society would want to ensure that bus travel remains within reach of those with very limited means. That is precisely why we are proposing a guaranteed half-fare scheme for pensioners in England and Wales, with a maximum £5 annual bus pass. I am sure that that, with many other measures that we are taking to increase activity and access and promote growth in the bus passenger market, will be widely welcomed by pensioners in my hon. Friend's constituency and throughout the country.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Will the Minister accept that half-fare bus travel is not really enough—that our pensioners should be entitled to travel at half fare by coach, bus, rail, ferry or any mode of transport, and that our pensioners deserve such a comprehensive scheme?

Dr. Reid: That is another penny on the tax, I suppose. Of course, in an ideal world, we would like to make half-fare travel even more extensive, but I think that the hon. Gentleman would be churlish if he did not at least accept that the Government's proposals to extend half-fare bus travel to all pensioners throughout England and Wales represent a major advance on anything that has gone before and will be widely welcomed by pensioners in his constituency and throughout the country.

New Forest

4. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If he will make a statement about his plans to introduce new legislation affecting the status of the New forest. [78819]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Alan Meale): We are still looking very carefully at all the issues connected with a possible change in status for the New forest. We hope to announce some conclusions soon.

Mr. Swayne: Over the last 30 years, on every issue of conservation against development, one or other of the local authorities has backed the developers only to be thwarted by the verderers, exercising their existing powers under the New Forest Acts. Can the Minister assure me, therefore, that he will not produce proposals setting up a new park authority with statutory powers that could restrain in any way the freedom of action of the verderers court?

Mr. Meale: I assure the hon. Gentleman—as I did in the recent debate in the House, which he initiated—that

full consideration will be given to the verderers' views and that we envisage no likely change in the role that they undertake at present.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Does the Minister accept that it is quite possible to establish national park status for the New forest, which would be very much welcomed by many people living in the area, without necessarily removing the powers of the verderers under certain circumstances or many of the planning powers of the local authority, and that many people would welcome that way forward for the New forest?

Mr. Meale: I am aware that there is a wide variety of views. Indeed, we have received many hundreds of letters on this subject. There are those who are strongly in favour of national park status and those who are against it in the area concerned.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does the Minister agree that in areas such as the New forest and the south downs, it is far better to build on existing structures that have been proved successful rather than listen to noisy minorities that want national park status? When will the hon. Gentleman announce his final decision on these issues?

Mr. Meale: I repeat that that will be soon. We are determined to get the decision-making process right rather than to accommodate one side or the other. The hon. Gentleman might consider the views of the Leader of the Opposition who, when recently interviewed by the Southampton *Daily Echo*, expressed the view that he had no difficulties with national park status in the two relevant areas which adjoin his constituency.

Freight Costs

5. **Mr. Alan W. Williams** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): If he will make a statement on the level of freight costs in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other EU member states. [78820]

13. **Mr. Mark Todd** (South Derbyshire): If he will make a statement on road freight costs in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EU member states. [78828]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): For a typical haulage operator with 50 articulated trucks, if we include social costs, national insurance, corporation tax, labour costs, fuel and excise duty, the additional cost in France, as compared with the UK, is about £425,000 a year; in the Netherlands about £600,000; and in Belgium about £800,000. These issues will be discussed in more detail by the road haulage forum.

Mr. Williams: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that comprehensive reply. Does he agree, bearing in mind yesterday's truckers' protest, that the general public are presented with only one part of the picture? Will he go in considerable detail through the various factors with the road haulage forum and perhaps prepare and present an agreed report eventually so that there is transparency and so that the general public can understand that road haulage costs in Britain are about a third less than those in France, Germany and Italy?

Dr. Reid: Yes, I certainly will. The general public are coming to recognise that when all costs are considered, the UK haulage industry is more competitive than the majority of its European competitors. There is overcapacity in the industry, and I take that seriously. That is why I am involved in discussions with the road haulage and freight associations on that and other matters.

It is a matter of deep regret that a militant section of the hauliers have rejected the path of dialogue and have opted instead to disrupt, inconvenience and punish millions of ordinary members of the public while discussions are taking place. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House would wish to condemn such destructive action.

Mr. Todd: I certainly thank the Minister for the last part of his reply. I share his view entirely, as I think would my constituents. However, may I ask him three questions on this issue—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I shall do so very quickly. First, my right hon. Friend referred to a 50-truck company. I would be interested—I am sure that the road haulage forum would find it helpful—to explore the position of a smaller company, including its cash flow, as a result of the change in tax status. Secondly, what is the impact on market share over the period in which the increased taxes will be introduced? Thirdly, are there means of measuring the impact on the environment of these taxes so that we can ensure that the outcomes are those that we are seeking?

Dr. Reid: Yes. At great risk of going on at tremendous length, I think that it would be helpful if we considered some of these issues. I can tell my hon. Friend, for instance, that labour costs are higher for our continental neighbours by more than 55 per cent. in France, 95 per cent. in Belgium and 75 per cent. in the Netherlands. Corporation tax for individual firms—my hon. Friend asked specifically about smaller firms—is higher for our continental neighbours. It is 50.65 per cent. higher in France, 40.17 per cent. higher in Belgium and 35 per cent. higher in the Netherlands. I could go on indefinitely, but I undertake to write to my hon. Friend in answer to those three questions as well as any others he wishes to ask.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): If what the Minister says is correct, hauliers would be flagging out from France, Germany and the Netherlands and joining the United Kingdom truck industry, but quite the opposite is happening. UK hauliers are flagging out and registering elsewhere because, in the marketplace, the costs are cheaper. He cannot be unaware that independent research, supported by organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry, has shown that about 50,000 jobs will be at risk if the Government maintain these policies. The extra costs will be felt not only in the haulage industry, but throughout the whole of UK plc. Will he work out why UK hauliers are moving away rather than companies from elsewhere in Europe coming to this country?

Dr. Reid: May I correct the hon. Gentleman? The independent research to which he refers was commissioned by the Road Haulage Association; although it may be an honourable organisation, it is hardly independent in the present context. He and his party must be experts on flagging out—they cut their eye teeth on flagging out almost the whole of the British merchant shipping industry. He will be aware, as I am, that the leading exponent of flagging out—to Belize, I think—is the current treasurer of the Tory party.

On interchange of registration, in an increasingly integrated Europe, some British companies will flag out abroad as some companies from abroad will flag out in Britain. The fact is that all the independent assessments, including the most recent one by KPMG, show that, next to Austria, our road haulage industry is the most competitive in Europe.

Finally, as millions of people have again been condemned, punished, inconvenienced and disrupted by the militant action this week, it would be useful if, just for once, a Tory spokesman stood up to back the public and said how much the Tories condemn and regret the action.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The House and the country will no doubt be very interested in the figures given by the Minister, but will he go further and publish in the *Official Report* all the figures for all the European states, so that we can see what the facts are? Will he understand that those of us from Northern Ireland are particularly interested in the costs vis-à-vis Northern Ireland and the Republic, not least the cost of fuel?

Dr. Reid: I shall continue to publish as many facts as I can on this matter, because the one way to put the case in perspective is to put as many facts as possible before the public. I have to say that the way to solve problems such as this is through dialogue—not through disruption. We are concerned about the overcapacity in the industry and we want to help the hauliers, which is why I am having discussions with the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association, but we will not be held to ransom. I only wish that we had some of the courage shown by Conservative Members in standing up for the general public.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will my right hon. Friend ask his officials, or Treasury officials, to dig out the figures that really matter in this whole argument—the transport cost per tonne per kilometre, by road and by rail, in each European country, including the United Kingdom? I believe that those statistics will reveal the truth. Can we have those statistics published? If we cannot, can we have published some indicators that we all understand and which we can use in explanations to the road haulage industry?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend makes a good point. As he knows, there are any number of potential indicators and statistics can be used, on either side of an argument, to illustrate the case. I will certainly look at that particular method or at any other simplified way of putting the truth of this matter across to the public.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): If the right hon. Gentleman would agree this afternoon to commission a new report on the facts and figures surrounding the haulage industry, the Opposition would welcome that. But what the right hon. Gentleman said this afternoon will have been listened to with incredulity by the industry. If the British road haulage industry is in such a favourable and competitive position, why are his policies driving large British haulage companies out of the country and small British haulage companies out of business?

Dr. Reid: I take it that one of the companies to which the right hon. Lady refers is Eddie Stobart, a great British success story. Eddie Stobart operates a quarter of his lorries on the continent and he is registering them there. However, the right hon. Lady may not know that Eddie Stobart benefits from the DETR rail freight grants. I shall write to her about how many millions of pounds are involved.

We shall continue to discuss all these issues in the road haulage forum, but I notice that the right hon. Lady had not one word of sympathy for the public yesterday. Is it not a shameful hypocrisy that the party which, when in government, introduced, maintained and increased the fuel duty escalator, now attempts to abandon it? Is it not a shameful hypocrisy that the party which says that it is against European tax harmonisation now wants our taxes to be dictated by France and Luxembourg? Is it not a shameful hypocrisy that the party which, for 20 years, has condemned every militant action by every section of British workers, has now become the militants friend because it is too frit to stand up against the militant hauliers?

Concessionary Travel

6. **Mr. Paul Burstow** (Sutton and Cheam): What plans he has to review the arrangements for concessionary travel in Greater London. [78821]

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): Subject to the passage of the Greater London Authority Bill, provision will be made to continue arrangements, including a reserve free travel scheme which ensures that London's pensioners and eligible disabled persons continue to enjoy the benefits of concessionary travel.

Mr. Burstow: Does the Minister understand that, if just one of London's 33 boroughs refuses to support the concessionary fares scheme, it falls, and, as a consequence, a reserve scheme comes in which costs more, starts later in the day and excludes the use of the railways? Will the Minister, therefore, legislate to ensure that the freedom pass is safeguarded so that, if the worst happens and London's boroughs do not agree among themselves, we can guarantee to Londoners that they will not be the ones to lose out?

Ms Jackson: The whole point of the reserve scheme is that it guarantees a concessionary fares scheme for pensioners and disabled persons. We will, of course, listen to anyone who wishes to improve the present scheme and will react accordingly.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Does my hon. Friend accept that the present reserve scheme is out of date—I think that it goes back to 1985—and depends on the powers that were put in place on the abolition of the GLC? Will my hon. Friend consider bringing that scheme more up to date so that, if we fail to obtain agreement, we at least have a reserve scheme that matches today's conditions, not those of 1985?

Ms Jackson: The date to which my hon. Friend refers is 1984. As I have already said, we shall listen to anyone who comes forward with improvements to the existing scheme to ensure that pensioners and disabled persons in London can rest assured that their concessionary travel is secure.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

7. **Mr. David Lepper** (Brighton, Pavilion): When he expects to bring forward measures to implement proposals in the Government's consultation paper, "Sites of Special Scientific Interest–Better Protection and Management". [78822]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): Following the recent conclusion to the consultation exercise, to which we received nearly 600 responses, I hope to be in a position to make an announcement very soon outlining how we intend to proceed.

Mr. Lepper: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread public support for legislation for the greater protection of our wildlife which will be shown this afternoon by 250,000 pledges collected by the Countryside and Wildlife Link which will be presented to hon. Members? Will my right hon. Friend also note that 334 hon. Members have now signed early-day motion 11 in my name in support of such legislation, and agree that a commitment to introduce legislation more securely to protect our wildlife would be welcome? Can my right hon. Friend give a commitment to the early introduction of that legislation?

Mr. Meacher: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his persistent campaigning in support of wildlife protection. I recognise the widespread support in the country for the strengthening of wildlife protection laws. As the House knows, 335 signatories to an early-day motion is a large number and shows strong support from hon. Members. As soon as parliamentary time permits, I intend to introduce legislation to strengthen the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which is now outdated in significant ways.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I assure the Minister that we shall look forward to his announcement with great interest, because we believe that the 1981 Act needs to be tightened up and improved. Does he accept that the crown jewels of our wildlife heritage, the SSSIs, are in a desperate state? There have been more than 2,000 cases of damage in the past six years, 46 sites have lost their SSSI status and hundreds more have had part of their designated area depleted. Do the Government accept that there is an urgent need to take quick action to prevent further erosion and damage to these important sites? Can the Minister give the House any reassurance that, before further legislation is introduced and enacted, more will be done under existing rules and regulations to tighten the protection of these important areas?

Mr. Meacher: I agree that, over the years, SSSIs have been significantly damaged. The reasons for that are road building programmes, over-abstraction of water and intensification of agriculture, all of which were significantly increased under the previous Government. We are taking action on all three fronts. Last year, we carried out a review of the roads programme. We are also reviewing existing consents for water abstraction and seeking the time-limiting of all consents. At the negotiations on the common agricultural policy in Brussels and Berlin, we have recently made significant progress on the countryside through the inclusion of the rural development regulation and cross-compliance on environmental conditions for agricultural grants. Those measures will reduce the damage that was done in the Tory years.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does my right hon. Friend agree that new legislation in this area is not only desirable in principle, but urgent in practice because of the steady deterioration referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) and other hon. Members? Does he accept that this subject has excited great public concern beyond the usual groups that routinely write to us?

Mr. Meacher: I accept what my hon. Friend has said. The Government published a consultation paper, "Sites of Special Scientific Interest—Better Protection and Management", last September. The radical policies that it contains were broadly accepted during the consultation process. I repeat that we are seeking the earliest opportunity to introduce a new Bill to give greater protection to SSSIs, which are essential for wildlife.

London Underground

8. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will make a statement about the Government's policy on *(a)* investment in and *(b)* fares on London underground. [78823]

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): Our policy on investment in London underground is to secure high and stable investment in modernising and maintaining the system. Fares are currently the responsibility of London Transport, but following the establishment of the Greater London Authority, they will become the responsibility of the mayor.

Sir Sydney Chapman: How can the Minister be confident that private investment in the infrastructure of the London underground will be forthcoming, given that the assets created will remain in or return to the public sector? The Transport Sub-Committee has referred to the public-private partnership as a convoluted compromise. Is not the truth of the matter that the PPP will lead to a lack of adequate investment and a continuation of fares rising above the rate of inflation, in contradistinction to the privatised railways whose fares have gone down in real terms since privatisation?

Ms Jackson: No. Private sector interest in our proposals for PPP is very strong. As for fare rises, according to the modelling, fares will rise at a rate conforming to the retail prices index plus 1 in 2000–01, and at RPI plus 0 after 2001. That is in marked contrast to the last decade of the last Administration, during which, despite promises to freeze London Transport fares, they rose by 38 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Is not the real picture very different? Does the Minister agree that the last Government were investing £700 million a year in the underground, while the present Government are investing £500 million? Does she agree that, while this Government's PPP will raise £7 billion over 15 years,

the last Government spent that in 10 years? Does she agree that, while the private railways are experiencing rising investment and falling fares, the underground is experiencing falling investment and rising fares, and that, after decades of expansion, no new lines are planned? What on earth has happened to the Labour party's manifesto pledge to improve the London underground?

Ms Jackson: The last Administration reduced core investment in the London underground year on year. Their only solution to the problems was to wash their hands of the underground by promoting a privatisation that would have reduced the existing network by at least a third, and which received the big thumbs-down from Londoners. Our proposal for public-private investment has been welcomed, and will provide enough investment to ensure that our underground is of a quality fit not only for the people of London, but for the 21st century.

Rural Bus Services

9. **Mr. Gareth Thomas** (Clwyd, West): If he will make a statement on rural bus services. [78824]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): Rural areas throughout Great Britain now have new or improved bus services as a result of the new money for rural transport announced in each of the last two Budgets. A total of £150 million over three years was provided for rural transport in last year's Budget, and that was increased by over £20 million in this year's Budget.

Mr. Thomas: That announcement is particularly welcome in the light of the Conservative party's mismanagement of rural transport.

First, does my right hon. Friend agree that, when public money is spent on matters such as rural transport, effective consultation is essential if services are to meet needs? That is certainly my experience in north Wales. Secondly, can my right hon. Friend give us some details of improvements in rural bus services?

Dr. Reid: I agree that consultation is essential. Indeed, local authorities, especially those that are taking the integration of transport and the provision of transport services for those in their areas seriously—the vast majority of which are Labour authorities—are an essential part of an integrated transport policy.

My hon. Friend asked what effect the grants had had. So far, 55 replies have been received to 73 questionnaires in an initial survey of English local authorities. They show that there are 578 new services, while the frequency or coverage of a further 744 has improved. That is a result of the extra money provided by a Labour Government. Furthermore, the £2.25 million allocated in 1998–99 under the Welsh rural bus subsidy grant scheme—including £76,000 for Conwy and £91,000 for Denbighshire, both of which are in my hon. Friend's constituency—has resulted in improved and additional services.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Many villages in my rural constituency will suffer further strain because of the lack of provision of places in schools. In Clitheroe, for instance, many youngsters will have to be bussed miles out of their area to attend neighbouring schools. Has the Minister had any discussions with the Department for Education and Employment to ensure that there is better planning in regard to school places, so that youngsters need not travel on buses for many hours and many miles in the morning just to receive a decent education?

Dr. Reid: We are, of course, grappling with our inheritance from the hon. Gentleman's party. However, we have not only discussed the matter with the Department for Education and Employment, but formed the school travel advisory group, which is examining it closely.

We are not always helped by Conservative councils throughout the country. For example, only in the past few days, in Norfolk county council—which I believe is the council that covers the area that is represented by the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard)—there was a move to introduce 10 additional double-decker buses to moderate the market for school travel. Unfortunately, that was opposed by the Conservative group on the council. Thankfully, a combination of Labour and Liberal councillors managed to secure that service for local pupils and their parents.

North-East Regional Chamber

10. **Mr. Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow): When the regional chamber in the north-east will be officially established. [78825]

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): We are considering proposals from the north-east regional chamber for designation as the regional chamber for the north-east under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Hepburn: I thank the Minister for that helpful reply, but is he aware that business people and some council leaders in the north-east see themselves at a distinct disadvantage compared with their Scottish counterparts, who will possibly have the advantage of a Scottish Parliament to champion their cause in terms of job creation and economic prosperity? How will the establishment of a regional chamber in the north-east alleviate those concerns?

Mr. Caborn: I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that, only 10 days ago, we set up the regional development agencies; they are now in operation. As I have said, the regional chambers will be designated. As part of our total devolution package, we are managing that change very carefully and with the consent of the people. I have no doubt that, some time in the future, the north-east, like every other region, will have the opportunity to decide whether it wants a directly elected regional assembly. That will be done with the consent of the people in the various regions. Indeed, we have managed the devolution package for the United Kingdom in that way.

Rail Summits

11. **Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): What plans he has to hold regular rail summits with the rail operators. [78826]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): The February rail summit was a major step towards driving up

the quality of rail services throughout the country. We want and deserve year-on-year improvements in rail performance. We will hold a second summit next spring to review progress and to maintain the momentum.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does not the publication today of the independent report to the Rail Regulator give credence to the view of the fare-paying public that Railtrack and the franchise operators are both the same and both to blame for under-investment at a time when they are maximising profits? At a future rail summit, will my right hon. Friend make it clear to both Railtrack and the franchise operators that the profits of Railtrack cannot be shifted to the franchisees when there is a review of access charges? There needs to be discipline in investing in Railtrack—the infrastructure—and a proper service needs to be provided by the rail franchise operators. If not, the Government will need to act.

Dr. Reid: We are scrutinising today's report carefully. We have made it clear that we support the then regulator's view that not sufficient of the surplus that was generated by Railtrack was going into investment. My hon. Friend can be assured that the Deputy Prime Minister and I will, in future, as we have in the past, insist that the public get the sort of investment from Railtrack that they should be getting to improve railway services.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will the Minister confirm that, in 1997–98, Railtrack invested an extra £1.25 billion—an increase of 69 per cent. over the last year before flotation—and that, in the current financial year, a further 16 per cent. increase is planned? While he is on his feet confirming those facts—and the fact that the only thing that has saved the railways is a channel tunnel that was built by the private sector under a Conservative Government and with the involvement of private sector investment—will he have a word with the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning? Can he explain why, although his ministerial colleague promised at the previous DETR Question Time to write to me, despite three chasing calls from my office to his private office, I have yet to have a response on an urgent matter involving my constituents? Is that not disgraceful?

Dr. Reid: I would rather not comment on the hon. Gentleman's private telephone calls. On investment, I can confirm that the previous regulator took the view that the figures that were being invested by Railtrack were insufficient. He is an independent regulator. I can confirm the figure—which the hon. Gentleman gave—of £1.25 billion for the year before last. I can also confirm that only slightly less than that figure was lost to the public by the Conservatives, who sold off Railtrack cheaply.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the problem in my constituency, where Connex South Eastern has been locking out disabled passengers from access to the level platforms by closing side gates, for security reasons? Does he accept that far too many rail companies are disabling their potential passengers by such actions? Will he ensure that a future rail summit will raise that issue, and have on its agenda compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995?

Dr. Reid: Yes.

Manchester International Airport

14. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): If he will make a statement on road links to Manchester International airport. [78829]

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): We propose to begin a multi-modal study in spring, assessing the transport problems around Manchester airport and the area to the south-east of Manchester.

Mr. Winterton: Will the Minister tell us whether she is aware that support for the second runway at Manchester airport was given because it was indicated by Government that the appropriate infrastructure to serve the airport, not least the road infrastructure, which includes the Macclesfield to Poynton road improvement, the MAELR road—the Manchester airport eastern link road—and the Poynton bypass, would proceed in a priority programme? Will the Minister come to my constituency to see the increasing devastation arising from increased traffic anticipating the second runway at Manchester airport, so that my constituents are aware that this Government are prepared to take responsibility for a decision that a Government of this country took, and will not allow the environment of the villages of Poynton, Mottram St. Andrew and Prestbury to be eroded, as is happening now?

Ms Jackson: I should dearly love to visit the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but think that it is highly unlikely that I shall have the time to do so in the immediate future. He spoke of the "appropriate infrastructure", which is precisely what the Government are committed to discovering. We must get away from the idea—the previous Administration were beginning to move away from it—that the only appropriate form of infrastructure is exclusively that which is solely dependent on roads. That is not sustainable, either economically or environmentally.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does my hon. Friend accept that far too many people still have to approach Manchester airport—particularly those who work there—by private car, and that it would be far better if the Government could give priority to getting the tramway system, which is doing so well in Greater Manchester, extended to the airport?

Ms Jackson: The Metrolink issue has been raised by the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority with both my right hon. Friends and me. We are perfectly willing to listen to the authority's arguments on the matter. The responsibility for the matter is the authority's, and dealing with it must be part and parcel of its local integrated transport plans.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Is the Minister aware—from her comments to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), I take it that she is not—that a third of the Manchester airport eastern link road and the Poynton bypass already exists, but that it does not join the airport and does not go anywhere in the east? I hardly think that it is asking a lot of the Minister to consider coming to my hon. Friend's constituency and to Cheadle to see for herself that that road, which is very much a

reality in the centre, should be connected to those parts of the infrastructure in the north-west that it was intended originally to serve.

Ms Jackson: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not take the opportunity to apologise for the previous Administration, who have clearly left a third of a road going absolutely nowhere. As I told the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), we shall start a multi-modal study in the spring.

Buses

15. **Mr. David Crausby** (Bolton, North-East): If he will make a statement on the latest data on the number of people using buses. [78830]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): The latest figures published by my Department show an overall increase of 1 per cent. in passenger journeys on buses in England in 1997-98. That marks the first reversal of a 50-year decline in bus use.

Mr. Crausby: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that the thoughtless privatisation of bus services was a disaster? What plans does he have to encourage the greater use of bus services in preference to the private car?

Dr. Reid: Yes. We have been working actively with local authorities and bus operators through the quality partnerships, and we intend to legislate to introduce quality contracts if necessary. The extra money that we have provided for buses, to compensate for the fuel duty escalator, is a topic of some interest, especially in rural areas. Our efforts have resulted in the historic reversal in the trend that I have already mentioned. Given the long-term trend of decline, the latest patronage figures for 1997-98 are encouraging. We have halted that decline, and passenger journeys in London are up by no less than 4 per cent., and in the west midlands by 5 per cent., compared with the previous year. That is another area in which, after 20 years of the Conservative Government, we are bringing about historic shifts in transport patterns.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In view of the right hon. Gentleman's encouragement of bus transport, will he tell the House how many times he has travelled to ministerial engagements by bus since he assumed his present post?

Dr. Reid: I have travelled by bus, and by tube, on several occasions. Unlike some previous Conservative Ministers, I do not find people who travel by public transport so despicable that I avoid it.

Alternative Fuels

16. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What steps he is taking to encourage the manufacture of compressed natural gas vehicles and the conversion of existing petrol and diesel vehicles to alternative fuels. [78831]

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): The Energy Saving Trust's powershift programme, funded by my Department, contributes towards the additional cost of purchasing gas and electric vehicles. In the recent Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor reduced duty on compressed natural gas and liquefied petroleum gas by 29 per cent.—a strong incentive to convert to those fuels.

Mr. Prentice: That was a good answer; we must all celebrate the 29 per cent. cut in fuel duty for gas vehicles in the Budget. However, is it not true that we will never get people to convert their vehicles until there are pumps in filling stations to allow them to fill up their tanks with compressed natural gas? What are the Government doing actively to encourage filling stations to put compressed natural gas pumps on their forecourts?

Ms Jackson: My hon. Friend is right; there is certainly a need for further improvements in the refuelling infrastructure. However, there are signs that fuel suppliers now have the confidence to invest significantly in gas refuelling facilities, and the recent Budget announcements should provide further impetus for their plans.

Local Government Finance

17. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): What has been the average rate of increase in percentage terms in the allowable spending of local councils over the past five years; and what is the figure for Rochford. [78832]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): The average allowable increase in the spending of local councils in England over the past five years was 2.7 per cent. For Rochford, it was 2.8 per cent. This year, the Government have not set spending limits for individual authorities.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the Minister is aware, Rochford is an area with high unemployment and many social problems, and needs investment—but is she also aware that since the Government came to power, the council has been concerned about the financial nightmare that it has had to face? Is she willing to reconsider the situation in Rochford and tell us in what way grants for the area were increased this year? According to the information given to me, they have not been increased, but fell in real terms.

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman will know that the sums that the Government have provided for local government this year are higher than for the past seven years. His local council, which covers Rochford, has not had a spending limit imposed this year. It has increased its budget by 2.8 per cent. Council tax rises are substantially higher in Tory authorities than in Labour authorities. I invite the hon. Gentleman to help us to get the best value from local government by ensuring that authorities use the increased money that they are getting from the Government this year effectively for local people.

Kosovo

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I would like, with your permission, Madam Speaker, to bring the House fully up to date with events in Kosovo. There will be a debate in the House early next week.

NATO's actions continue. Our targets include the Serbian air defence system, the command and control centres of the Yugoslav army and special police forces, the lines of communication that Milosevic uses to resupply his forces in Kosovo, his fuel supplies and, increasingly, the Serb forces on the ground engaged in ethnic cleansing. The armed forces of 13 allies are taking a direct part in the NATO action. I am proud of the full role being played by the men and women of the British armed forces. They have the thanks of the whole House.

Our aims are clear. They were set out again at the meeting yesterday of NATO Foreign Ministers. They are: a verifiable end to all Serb military action and the immediate ending of violence and repression; the withdrawal from Kosovo of Milosevic's military, police and paramilitary forces; agreement to the stationing in Kosovo of an international military force; the unconditional and safe return of all refugees and displaced persons and unhindered access to them by humanitarian aid organisations; and credible assurance of willingness to work on the basis of the Rambouillet accords in the establishment of a political framework agreement for Kosovo in conformity with international law and the charter of the United Nations.

Once we have succeeded militarily we need to negotiate a political settlement based on the Rambouillet agreement. It must be a settlement that brings lasting peace to the entire region. Our action will continue until those aims are met.

There is no longer any serious doubt that the warnings that we gave about Milosevic and his intentions were fully justified. Half a million Kosovar Albanians have fled or been driven out of Kosovo into the neighbouring territories of Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. In no small measure due to British efforts, those who sought refuge in neighbouring countries are now being looked after and have at least found shelter, food and safety.

I would like to pay tribute to the British troops in Macedonia who built a camp for some 30,000 people inside 48 hours; to the sterling work of my right hon Friend the Secretary of State for International Development in persuading the Macedonian Government fully to open the border; to British non-governmental organisations for their rapid response in getting relief through to the refugees; and to the tremendous generosity of the British people, who have already given some £10 million to the Kosovo appeal and added substantially to the £23 million committed so far by the Government. I should like also to commend the Albanian Government, who have been unstinting in providing a welcome to those fleeing from Kosovo.

Our concern is now for those still inside Kosovo. Milosevic's forces continue their ethnic cleansing, but at a reduced level. As a result of NATO action to date, the pace has significantly diminished. His tanks have to conceal themselves from NATO aircraft. His fuel supplies are running low. Some estimate that, taking into account all those displaced over several months, half a million or so Kosovar Albanians have been driven from their homes but remain within the province. Many have sought refuge in the hills and forests of Kosovo. We are looking urgently at all the options to assist them. Let me say this clearly: Milosevic is responsible for the welfare of those people. When we go into Kosovo finally, he will be held responsible for what we find.

Let me deal with some of the wider strategic issues. Some say that NATO should never have acted at all; some say, too soon; some say, not enough. However inconsistent those points, they all deserve an answer. Milosevic's action in Kosovo—the murder, rape and terror that he has visited on innocent people—provides ample justification for military action.

To those who wanted still more negotiation, I say that we struggled for a year to find a solution for Kosovo by peaceful means, despite Milosevic's brutality on the ground. We intervened only when the diplomatic avenue was exhausted, and when the hideous policy of ethnic cleansing was under way. Make no mistake: the brutality was planned well in advance. Even as the Rambouillet talks were continuing, Serb troops were massing in Kosovo and a new offensive was getting under way, with 40,000 troops and 300 tanks assembled. We now know that Belgrade was making detailed plans for ethnic cleansing as early as February.

Five days before NATO dropped a single bomb, Serb forces began a massive new offensive aimed at clearing Kosovo of its ethnic Albanian majority, wiping out their political class and even destroying evidence that Albanians had ever lived there.

To those who say that we should put in ground forces now, as part of a land force invasion of Kosovo, I repeat that the difficulties of such an undertaking, in the face of organised Serb resistance, are formidable. In the present circumstances, the potential loss of life among our service men and women, to say nothing of civilians, would be considerable, and in any event, assembling such a force would take weeks.

Every day, however, by air power, we are causing further damage to Milosevic's military machine: his air defence system is seriously degraded; half his front-line air force is now unusable; the roads and railways supplying his forces in Kosovo are largely cut; fuel is now in short supply, hampering the movement of his tanks and trucks; and artillery and troops on the ground are now being targeted and hit.

We make every effort to avoid civilian casualties, though some casualties will be inevitable in such action, and our attitude stands in sharp contrast to the utter lack of scruple of Milosevic towards the civilian population in Kosovo.

Britain and our forces can be proud of the role that we have played, in both the military campaign and the humanitarian effort. Day and night, our pilots are risking their lives to inflict defeat on Milosevic and our forces are working to help to alleviate the misery of the refugees driven from their homes and their homeland by his policy of ethnic cleansing; and day and night we are also preparing for the job that we have to do when our military objectives are met.

Today I can announce that we are sending substantial reinforcements for that purpose, with a second armoured battle group. At the moment, the British Army contingent in Greece and Macedonia consists of just over 4,500

military personnel. The remainder of HQ 4 Armoured Brigade and supporting elements are now being sent to the region—all are currently based at their home locations in the United Kingdom and Germany—taking the total number of UK military personnel in Greece and Macedonia to more than 6,300.

Let me make it clear, for the avoidance of doubt, that those personnel are being sent so that the UK can be in a position to play our proper role in the international effort to ensure that the refugees are able to return to Kosovo in safety.

As I said in my first statement to the House, this action will take time. Dictators such as Milosevic do not bow down at the first setback to their plans, but as the weather improves, his forces have fewer hiding places. When new weapons systems are available, such as the attack helicopters, no Serb unit in Kosovo will be able to destroy a village with confidence that it will not be challenged by more powerful forces.

We continue with diplomacy to back up our military action. Tomorrow in Brussels, I shall meet with my colleagues on the European Council and this meeting is being brought forward to include a session with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The NATO Alliance has a long-planned summit in Washington at the end of next week. I and my colleagues will continue to remain in close touch with our Russian counterparts, who will have an important role to play when Milosevic is brought to meet NATO's requirements.

As for NATO, we must remain united and resolute. There can be no compromise on the terms we have set out. They must be met in full. We shall continue until they are. Ethnic cleansing must be defeated, and seen to be defeated. Milosevic's policies in Kosovo must be defeated, and seen to be defeated. I believe that we have a clear strategic interest in peace in the Balkans, but this is now military action for a moral purpose as much as a strategic interest. The barbarity perpetrated against innocent civilians in Kosovo, simply on the ground of their ethnic identity, cannot be allowed to succeed.

The conflict we now face in Kosovo is a test of our commitment and our resolve to ensure that the 21st century does not begin with a continuing reminder in Europe of the worst aspects of the century now drawing to a close. I urge the House to continue to give its unfailing support to the men and women of our armed forces and to the values they are striving to uphold on behalf of us all.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): We should never forget that in order to achieve peace and security in Kosovo, British service men now risk their lives every day. We should salute their courage and we join the Prime Minister in doing so. On the basis of the Government's assurances about the military situation and what could be achieved, the air strikes have been supported by the Opposition and, three weeks later, we continue to give our support. The Prime Minister will no doubt agree that for the campaign to be successful the strategy must be clear and consistent. I wish to ask him three sets of questions about how we will now proceed.

First, do the objectives of the action remain those that were set out at the start of the campaign? The Prime Minister said in his statement that the Rambouillet accords are still being treated as the basis for a political settlement. Does he believe that the Kosovar Albanians will now require something more than the degree of autonomy set out in those accords if they are to agree to return to their homes? Following this morning's meeting, can the Prime Minister set out in more detail the role that he sees Russia playing both in helping to reach a settlement and in enforcing it? Is it still his view that a peacekeeping force must be a NATO force? The Prime Minister has rightly described President Milosevic as a dictator and spoken of the need for war crimes investigations. How does he view the likelihood of us now being able to negotiate a political settlement with Milosevic?

Secondly, there is the central issue of the Kosovar Albanians. What information does the Prime Minister have on the fate of those who have not crossed the border and, in particular, about the terrible reports of massacres of young Kosovar men and systematic rape of Kosovar women by Serbian forces? What steps is NATO taking to break through the wall of propaganda and to ensure that the Serbian people are made fully aware of the atrocities being conducted by Milosevic and his thugs? The aid agency workers, many of them volunteers, are doing a fantastic job. Can the Prime Minister confirm that it is Government policy, wherever possible, to support the refugees in the region—as they themselves wish—rather than to move them to other parts of Europe? Does he agree that Macedonia needs more assistance, bearing in mind the large number of refugees who remain there and the implications that may have for its stability?

Thirdly, the announcement by the Prime Minister on the deployment of 1,800 more British troops puts the issue of ground forces into even sharper focus. He has said that there was no question of committing ground troops to an invasion of Kosovo in advance of a political settlement. More recently, he stated that he is keeping all options under review. Was the second of those statements intended in any way to modify the first?

Can the Prime Minister give the House any information about reports in the past hour that Serbs have attacked two villages in Albania and abducted three Albanians? Can he make it clear that, if such an incursion were confirmed, it would be treated with the utmost seriousness on both sides of the House?

As the Prime Minister has said, it is vital that this campaign is successful: it is vital for NATO and for the stability of the Balkans but, above all, it is vital for the Kosovar people.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support, and I shall answer the questions that he has set out.

The objectives remain exactly the same as NATO set them out. In respect of a political accord based on Rambouillet, as I have made clear, the present situation obviously changes the degree of trust—if there ever could be any trust—that the Kosovar Albanian people feel towards Milosevic. However, it is still important that we understand that the basis of an agreement is as set out at Rambouillet.

I hope that Russia's role will be to play a part in bringing Milosevic to the terms set out by NATO. We have kept in very close contact with our Russian counterparts in the past few weeks: my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been in touch with his counterpart; I have had conversations with Prime Minister

[The Prime Minister]

Primakov and I have been in touch with President Yeltsin. We are well aware of the need to emphasise to the Russians that we have no quarrel with them, but that the objectives that we have set out must be secured. In our view, the force that goes in must be NATO led. As has been made clear throughout, of course we want to ensure that that international force is allowed to guide people back into their homes in Kosovo, but its core must be NATO led. As for Milosevic himself, I do not think that it is a question of negotiating a settlement, but of him meeting the terms that NATO has set out. There will be no compromise over those terms; they will be secured in full.

In respect of information on the fate of the Kosovar Albanians, we obviously try to obtain the best intelligence as to what is happening inside Kosovo at the moment. In a sense, our concern has shifted. During the first period of time, our concern was for those people flooding across the border and how we could make provision for them. Our concern is now for those displaced inside Kosovo. As I indicated in my statement, we are examining every option for getting help to them. The most important thing is for us to make it very clear to Milosevic, to his generals and to people on the ground that they will be held responsible for anything that they are doing inside Kosovo.

As for breaking through the wall of propaganda, I agree that it would be good if we could do so. However, the media in Serbia are state run and there is no proper news service for people inside Serbia; they are given a wholly one-sided account of what is happening. I believe that many Serbian people would be utterly disgusted if they knew what was being done in their name to innocent ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

I agree with what the right hon. Gentleman says about the refugees in the region. Macedonia is being given as much assistance as possible, as are Montenegro and Albania. They all need assistance and they all need to know that the international community is behind them in the efforts that they are rightly making to deal with the refugees.

In respect of ground forces, the situation remains the same as it has done from the beginning.

The right hon. Gentleman's final point was about the report—I think that it surfaced at lunch time—about Serb forces going into the border region of Albania. We are trying to get correct information, but my understanding is that there was an incursion into one village that was driven out by Albanian forces. It is another border incident and such incidents have been continuing for some time, but the warning given by NATO yesterday in respect of any attempt to invade the integrity of neighbouring areas remains the same, and our commitment to see it through also remains the same.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I am grateful to the Prime Minister for his statement. As he knows, NATO has received steady and unwavering support from those on the Liberal Democrat Benches and will continue to do so.

The Prime Minister has said that President Milosevic is hurting. I imagine that he is, although I am bound to say that I have not yet seen any evidence that he has been forced to do something that he did not intend to do. I say that not because I believe that that situation will continue, but because we have not yet forced him to take such actions. Is it not the case that these operations still have a long way to go and that there will be setbacks, inevitably including casualties, among them no doubt unintended civilian casualties? As we regard those with deep regret, is it not proper that we should nevertheless remember that NATO is not targeting civilians, President Milosevic is? Is it not true that President Milosevic has, over the past year, systematically and brutally used the weapons of state and one of the most powerful armies in Europe to brutalise, rape and murder, and to remove Kosovar Albanians from their homes? Is it not correct to say that three quarters of Kosovar Albanians are homeless, and perhaps 700,000 at President Milosevic's mercy in the forests of Kosovo? Will the Prime Minister give an undertaking that NATO will do everything practical to assist those desperate people?

May I raise three specific points? First, we surely cannot expect Kosovo to remain under Serbian rule. That would be morally repugnant and practically impossible.

Secondly, while it would of course be better to send in ground troops with agreement, will the Prime Minister assure us that President Milosevic cannot have a veto on whether or not we send in ground troops? To give the ethnic cleanser a veto over whether those who have been ethnic cleansed may return would be totally unacceptable.

Thirdly, will the Prime Minister tell us what exactly is meant by a phrase being used by the Ministry of Defence, that ground troops may be used in a "permissive environment"? Does that mean when the risks are permissible? Or does it mean when President Milosevic permits? If it means the former, it is perfectly understandable. If it means the latter, it is intolerable.

The Prime Minister: First, on the air strike campaign against Milosevic, we must be aware of two risks—overstating the case and understating it. It is true that we have not yet secured our objectives. That is why the action continues, and it will continue until we do achieve them.

It would be a severe mistake, however, to say that no damage is being done to Milosevic, or that he is not hurting as a result of the campaign. Enormous damage is being done: half his aircraft are unusable, his fuel supplies are extremely low, a huge range of targets has been hit all over Serbia and Kosovo, and his lines of communication and supply are largely down. We are able, particularly as the weather clears, directly to target his troops on the ground. British forces have been part of the sorties that have been successful in that regard.

We must be persistent and patient if we are to see this through, and we have those qualities. I agree with what the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said about civilians: we will do everything that we can for people inside Kosovo, consistent with the effectiveness of our action.

The right hon. Gentleman asked three specific questions. On the status of Kosovo, I have said what I have said, and people will understand how much more difficult the position becomes as the world sees exactly what has happened to the ethnic Albanian people in Kosovo. It is important to recognise that Rambouillet sorted a lot of potential problems about how a long-term settlement would work. We are carefully considering how

that could fit into an overall settlement of stability and peace in the Balkan region. All those matters are being considered in detail.

On ground forces, there is no question of Milosevic having a veto. He has no veto over what we do. However, there is a difference between a land force invasion meeting organised resistance in highly difficult circumstances and a force that goes in to allow people to return to their homes in Kosovo.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me finally about the circumstances in which we use ground forces. I have set out those circumstances clearly. However, sometimes, when I read our newspapers, I fear people may think that all the options are not constantly considered, reviewed and worked on. They are worked on all the time. We have advanced our plans and proposals because we believe that they are the best way forward and the most secure way in which to achieve our objectives.

It is not possible for us—nor should it be expected of us—to go into every last detail of military tactics, strategy and capability when we are trying to conduct a campaign. I am standing in the House of Commons to answer questions, and I hope to give as much information as I possibly can. In Belgrade, there is no Parliament in which Milosevic is being questioned. He is giving no television interviews, and no interviewers are putting questions to his generals about how to proceed. That is one of the great differences between a democracy and a dictatorship, and long may it remain so. Without in any way taking away from what I have already said—I have set out clearly our position on ground forces—it is important that it is recognised that we have considered all the right options, and I genuinely believe that the strategy that we are pursuing is the right strategy for us and for the Kosovar Albanians.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Our own forces and those of our NATO allies deserve our full support. My right hon. Friend has properly said that it would take several weeks before a credible ground force could be assembled. Could he tell the House what is the current state of debate within NATO on training and arming the Kosovo Liberation Army, which knows the terrain and which, in the interim, could harry the Serb forces?

The Prime Minister: Our position on training and arming the KLA remains as it has been—we are not in favour of doing so, not least because of the UN embargo that is in place. We have no plans to change that.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Does the Prime Minister recall saying in his statement that the action will continue? I am sure that almost all hon. Members recognise that it is likely to be quite a long haul. During that long haul, we shall need bases and secure lines of supply. In that context, may I reinforce the comments made about the critical importance of Macedonia and Albania? It now appears that Hungary is moving into the front line as the newest member of NATO, finding itself as a possible supply route to avoid the sanctions which are leading to shortages of fuel and other things. These countries will become absolutely critical if our forces and bases and our ability to provide humanitarian help are to continue.

In connection with the Russian situation, while the Prime Minister pointed out the difficulties of combating Milosevic's propaganda, I do not believe that the Russian people have any sympathy for fascism, fascist brutality and ethnic cleansing on this scale. Not propaganda but getting the truth across as widely as we can through a number of countries which are in a position to help in this respect is equally critical.

The Prime Minister: I agree with both those points, and I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support. In relation to the bases of supply and communication, we are taking precisely the action that he outlined. What he says about Russia is correct. The Russian people fought in the second world war against the forces of fascism and racism. It is important, as we try to do all the time, to bring home to them and, indeed, so far as we can, to the Serbian people, the fact that our quarrel is not with them, but with the dictator who is carrying out a policy that all decent people, whether Russian, Serbian or of any other nationality, should abhor.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): If the air war goes on for weeks, months and even longer, with all the death and destruction that it causes, what contribution does the Prime Minister think that it will make to long-term peace and stability in the Balkans?

The Prime Minister: First, the death and destruction is being wrought by Milosevic on innocent Kosovar Albanian people. He is the person who began this policy of ethnic cleansing; we are trying to put a stop to it. My right hon. Friend asks me what contribution we will make. The contribution that we will make is to stop it. That is something that I would have hoped he would support.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that any partition of Kosovo would be a wholly unacceptable outcome of the barbaric ethnic cleansing that is taking place?

The Prime Minister: I agree with that entirely.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not of interest that when the refugees, many of whom have been terrorised out of their homes, are questioned, they put no blame on the NATO bombing, but blame those who are responsible—the murderers and rapists ordered by Milosevic and his fellow criminals? Is it not also of interest that when people in Serbia itself—in Belgrade and other cities and towns—are asked by British journalists about what is happening in Kosovo, they either do not know or deny the ethnic cleansing, which was the very reason for NATO's intervention in the first place? Does not that illustrate the fact that those people are being kept in the dark by the state-controlled television and media in Serbia?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The refugees who have gone over the border and those—in so far as we can communicate with them—who are still inside Kosovo have made it quite clear to us that they support the NATO campaign, want it to go on and, indeed, want it to intensify because they know that that is their only chance of returning to their homes in peace.

What my hon. Friend says about people in Serbia is of course right. We can give anyone who wishes copies of the read-out of the Serbian 90-minute evening news bulletins, but they will bear absolutely no relationship to anything that is happening in Kosovo.

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): It is clear that we are in the presence of the greatest war crimes in Europe for more

[Mr. Martin Bell]

than half a century—genocide, ethnic cleansing, forced marches and the mass expulsion of people from their homes—yet we continue to respond with air power, and air power alone. I wonder whether the Prime Minister can give a single example of air power alone achieving a decisive military objective. Is it not true that circumstances on the ground can be changed only by boots on the ground? Do we not have a moral as well as a military imperative to go for a ground intervention—whether opposed or unopposed?

The Prime Minister: On the air campaign, I refer the hon. Gentleman to what happened in Bosnia some years ago. I simply ask people who say that we should put in ground forces now to reflect on what an undertaking that is. We are taking the action that we are taking because we genuinely believe that it is in the interests of the Kosovar Albanian people, as well as the right course for our military.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I have just returned from visiting two refugee camps in Macedonia. The people to whom I spoke want one thing and one thing only: to return to their own homes. They tell me that NATO is the only organisation that can make that possible. They are unstinting in their praise of our military and aid workers, and of the generosity of the British people. Will my right hon. Friend ignore the bad advice of the leader of the Scottish National party and others, and keep up the pressure on the murderous Milosevic regime?

The Prime Minister: We certainly will keep up the pressure. My hon. Friend confirms exactly our understanding of the position of the refugees. What they really want is to get back over the border in safety to the homes and villages that they left. We shall make sure that they do.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Prime Minister is right to stress that the presence of ground forces in the theatre would be very important, even if they ultimately enter permissively, and that a military solution must be led by NATO, otherwise the protection of the Kosovars will not be credible. Will he go a little further and explain what political initiatives he is taking to look for longer-term stability in the region? It is clear that the Russian policy failed because it did not hold back Milosevic, but that some solution will need to involve the Russians if we are to gain the political advantages from NATO's courageous military stance.

The Prime Minister: All I would say to the hon. Gentleman at this stage is that we constantly explore the longer-term strategy necessary with the Russians and others because it is increasingly clear that that must be seen in the wider context of lasting peace in the Balkans. On ground forces, he is right in saying that they must be NATO led. That is not to say that other countries cannot participate. They must be NATO led, however, because that is the only way in which we will secure the safety of people inside Kosovo.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Why does the Prime Minister suppose that the Serb community who live in Britain, who see the television and have access to the newspapers, are 100 per cent. in favour of the stopping of bombing? Will the Prime Minister comment on the judgment of Spyros Kyprianou, having visited Belgrade, that it will go on for 100 days if necessary? That is the nature of the reaction of people who are bombed.

I have one specific question. Has the Prime Minister had across his desk the considered report of the German Federal Criminal Agency—I gather backed by Scotland Yard—which points out that the ethnic Albanian community is the most prominent group in Europe in the trafficking—*[Interruption.]* I am afraid that this is what the German Federal police say. They say that the KLA is drug financed—this is their view. What is our relationship with the KLA? There is a great danger that NATO has been tricked into being called in as the air arm of a very extreme group. This problem will not be solved by bombing, and some of us ask the Prime Minister to stop it tonight.

The Prime Minister: I can understand my hon. Friend being opposed to the bombing campaign; I really cannot understand his comments about the ethnic Albanian community, or about the KLA. There is no doubt as to who has been in the wrong. The people who cross the border are talking in the most harrowing terms of the rape, murder and brutality that they have witnessed. Those stories are real; that is what has actually happened in the last few weeks. The only way that we can stop it is to make sure that there is some force in the world prepared to stand up to Milosevic and say, "You will pay a price for this; and, if you carry on, you will pay a higher price and a heavier price," until he stops. I confess that I honestly do not understand my hon. Friend's attitude.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The right hon. Gentleman described Mr. Milosevic's conduct as amounting to the murder, rape and terror on innocent people, and he is right; but given that, how can the right hon. Gentleman contemplate entering into an agreement with him? Is there not an inherent contradiction between, on one hand, having a policy of holding Mr. Milosevic and his generals personally liable for their actions and, on the other, seeking to bind them into an agreement? How does he reconcile these two objectives?

The Prime Minister: That is a question that in the end amounts to less than it appears. We are not negotiating with Milosevic on that. We have set down the terms; he has to meet those terms. If he or anyone else has committed crimes and the International War Crimes Tribunal indicts them as war criminals, we shall pursue them exactly as we are still pursuing those people from Bosnia—and we are picking them up, they are being indicted, and they are being taken to The Hague. We shall carry on doing that.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): My right hon. Friend rightly pointed out the imperative reasons why NATO needed to act to oppose the ethnic cleansing that the Milosevic regime has been responsible for, but will he expand slightly on the long-term settlement that is being explored by NATO and others? Can he assure me that that long-term settlement will not effectively reward ethnic cleansing by redrawing borders to create a series of mono-ethnic states, but will instead

ensure that, in the fullness of time—it may be a long time ahead—we can recreate the multi-ethnic state that Kosovo could have been within Serbia if the Serbian Government had respected the autonomy of the region?

The Prime Minister: That is a good question. I believe that it is essential that any long-term settlement is not reached on the basis that we reward or tolerate ethnic cleansing.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): May I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement of the further troop deployment? Will he tell the House whether he and his colleagues in NATO have given any consideration to establishing safe havens along lines similar to those established in Iraq in 1991, which were extremely successful and backed up by coercive air power? Finally, in view of the fact that the refugees will return to a scene of total and utter devastation of their homes and communities, does the Prime Minister consider that it really is a very good idea in the next few days to get rid of a lot of Territorial Army sappers?

The Prime Minister: On the last point, we are quite sure that we have the required capability to carry out all the objectives that we set ourselves, and so does the Army, which is more important. As for the idea of safe havens, we consider all ways in which we can help to get aid to people and ensure their security. However, there are formidable difficulties in such an exercise. Of course, we keep everything under review.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): As a Member who has more Serbs in his constituency than most other Members have in theirs, may I say to my right hon. Friend that although they are desperately unhappy about the bombing, they know that there is a sense of shame among the Serb people at what is being done in their name? Ethnic cleansing is no part of Serbian culture. Ethnic cleansing is the mirror image of racial purity, which was practised during the second world war against the Serbs. Those thoughtful Serbs among my community know that, and that is the message that we must help them to get over. It is also the message that we must get over to the Serb people generally.

The Prime Minister: It is worth recalling that there are now 3.5 million displaced people in the Balkans as a result of Milosevic's policies. There are 1 million refugees in the European Union; and in Bosnia, before action was taken and the Dayton peace accords were put in place, 250,000 people died.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Can the Prime Minister say whether this morning's talks in Oslo have gone some way to making any progress in securing Russian involvement in this area, which I think we would all agree is not only desirable but probably essential for long-term stability?

The Prime Minister: I believe that those talks are going well. As I said earlier, I wish to have the Russians involved. However, there must be no dilution of the aims that NATO has set itself. In particular, we must ensure that there is no compromise whatever over Milosevic's forces being withdrawn from Kosovo, over the international force being in there, or over the people being allowed unconditionally to return to their homes in safety.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I can assure the Prime Minister that I share his absolute repugnance at ethnic cleansing. Refugees should have the opportunity to return to their homes in Kosovo. However, may I point out to my right hon. Friend that we must be even-handed and that we must consider also the plight of the 280,000 Serb refugees who were brutally treated in Krajina, many of whom are now in camps in Serbia? What will the Government do to ensure that we are seen to be even-handed in our approach to former Yugoslavia?

The Prime Minister: We strongly condemned the Krajina expulsion. That should show Serb people that we are entirely even-handed. We are against ethnic cleansing from whatever quarter it comes. It would be much easier if we had a Government in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with whom we could work to debate the civilised principles of international law. We would then be in a far better position to deal with all these problems.

Our commitment to a long-term strategy for the Balkans is clear, but it is very difficult to see how it can be achieved until the policy of ethnic cleansing is not just defeated but wiped out of the lexicon of dictatorship in the Balkans for ever.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): May I join the Prime Minister in expressing the appreciation of my constituents for the professionalism of our armed forces? Having said that, I remind the right hon. Gentleman of what he said during the recess on television—"You will all be able to return to your homes"—knowing full well that many of "you" were already dead and that many of their homes had already been destroyed.

Did the right hon. Gentleman hear Mr. John Simpson on BBC television last night indicating in effect that the present policy is the best possible recruiting sergeant for Mr. Milosevic among the Serbian population? It may be unpalatable, but when will the right hon. Gentleman recognise that he and his incompetent Foreign Secretary have been bundled by the American Commander-in-Chief into this policy, and that the only way out now—I agree with the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell)—will be boots and armed forces on the ground?

The Prime Minister: First, in relation to the Kosovar Albanians, the hon. Gentleman should go and speak to some of them before he condemns the NATO action. As for reports from Belgrade, I think that it is worth reminding ourselves, every time we get them, that those people are allowed to be there by the Serbian Government. There is no free, independent television or radio in Serbia. Even reports that come from Serbia we should treat with suspicion, when the only things that those journalists are shown are things that the Serbian Government wish them to see.

As for the idea that we were bundled into this action, for a year before we took it we tried every diplomatic avenue. We tried exploring every political possibility. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that we tried, for month after month in the peace talks at Rambouillet, to reach a settlement? Precisely because we knew the

[The Prime Minister]

difficulties of such a campaign. In the end, I am afraid that—like it or not—in the real world we had either to stand by and allow this policy of ethnic cleansing to go on unhindered or to stand up to it and challenge it—and we have done that.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): May I assure my right hon. Friend that, as one who is just old enough to remember London being bombed at the end of the war, I certainly would like the bombing to end as soon as possible? However, must we not remember—time after time, as he has said—that Milosevic has forced us into this situation? Milosevic has refused—his track record shows it—to stop the ethnic cleansing and the policies that we find totally unacceptable; and this country would have been guilty if we had failed to take action and do something about that.

Is not the simple message to Milosevic, at all times, that he has the solution in his own hands and that he has to go forward from Rambouillet—and the quicker, the better? Does my right hon. Friend accept that countries such as Romania, which are right in the neighbourhood, also fully support the stand being taken by this country?

The Prime Minister: I agree with that entirely.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): Does the Prime Minister appreciate that, as a result of the additional deployments of ground forces that he has announced today, nearly half our Army will be on active service, adding to the overstretch that it is already experiencing? Will the Government therefore give serious consideration to reversing their decision to mutilate the Territorial Army, which is our first line of reserve, or at least to postponing any implementation of that decision until after the Kosovo operation is ended, bearing in mind that large numbers of troops will be required on the ground to secure any peace, which is bound to be precarious, once the operation is concluded?

The Prime Minister: The Army has the capability to carry out the objectives that we have set ourselves. I do not want to get into a debate across the Chamber about the TA and so on, but I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that I recall that the Government whom he supported cut our armed forces by about 30 per cent. If we got into an argument of that nature, it would not be one that the Conservative party would win.

In relation to ground forces, it is precisely because we know that we will need a ground force to secure any lasting peace there that we are assembling the forces in the region. We have the forces available to do that.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Given that what was supposed to be the world's first humanitarian war has turned into humanitarian disaster—with the Kosovars, in the short term, losing a country and the Serbs being bombed into the stone age—will the Prime Minister tell the House what is humanitarian about bombing a factory where workers are trying to protect their jobs? What is humanitarian about bombing civilians on a passenger train? Is it not time to stop the bombing, bring in the United Nations and the Russians and get all parties round the negotiating table? There has to be a political solution at the end of the day; is not it better to start now?

The Prime Minister: There is nothing very humanitarian, either, about ethnic cleansing. As for a political solution, I have to say to my hon. Friend that there has always been one available. There is a political solution available now, but it depends on Milosevic stopping the repression, getting his forces out of Kosovo, allowing an international force in and people going back unhindered to their homes and their villages. Those are the only circumstances in which the NATO action will stop and that is the only humanitarian solution to this issue.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): Does the Prime Minister appreciate the irony that this week there falls the anniversary of the great Luftwaffe terror raid on Belgrade in 1941, ordered by Hitler in a rage because the Serbs had deposed the corrupt regency, refused to accede to his demands and were siding with Britain? Does he not see that he is straining the credulity of the House by saying that this bombardment is directed against Milosevic's war machine, when he has only to read the report from *The Times* Bonn correspondent to see that, in the past 24 hours, it has destroyed a plastics factory, scored several direct hits on a bus station and destroyed a white goods factory—in addition, as the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) pointed out a moment ago, to attacking and causing civilian casualties on a train? Does the Prime Minister realise that he is associating the House and the country with a sustained bombardment of a brave and Christian people who have never injured or even threatened a British citizen?

The Prime Minister: We make every attempt possible to minimise civilian casualties, but in actions such as this there will be civilian casualties. But the person who is engaged in oppression and terror is Milosevic in Kosovo. Where are these hundreds of thousands of people coming from, pouring across the border into Macedonia and Albania? They are fleeing from the terror regime that he is visiting upon them. It may be that British citizens are not at risk there, but there are human beings at risk, and we owe a duty, in Britain's best traditions, to support them in their fight for humanity.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): May I ask my right hon. Friend two short questions? First, when the Ministry of Defence talks about areas being safe for troops to go to, as the leader of the Liberal Democrats said, are we not talking about peace keeping as opposed to peace making—"permissive" meaning peace keeping, not peace making? Secondly, my right hon. Friend referred to discussions with Prime Minister Primakov and President Yeltsin. Can he give us an interpretation of those discussions to illustrate what President Yeltsin meant last week when he talked about the possibility of a world war and of nuclear weapons being re-targeted on western Europe and north America?

The Prime Minister: I was simply making the point that there is a difference between a land invasion force and a force that goes in to secure people's return to their homeland, and that is what the ground force is there for. In relation to the discussions with the Russians, it is interesting to note that they do not object to the basis of the Rambouillet accords. On the contrary, they could support that. It is true, of course, that they object to the NATO military action. They have made that clear and I do not expect them to change that position. But they are as appalled as anyone else by Milosevic's actions, and it is important to remember that as we try to plot not just the military but the diplomatic path during the next few weeks.

Point of Order

4.24 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. We have always been particularly careful that there should not be insult, intended or unintended, to individuals outside the House. I do not think that the Prime Minister meant it this way, but will he reflect on what he said about John Simpson and, for that matter, by implication, the other correspondents in Belgrade—

Madam Speaker: Order. I clearly heard what the Prime Minister said and it was perfectly in order.

Community Protection (Landfill)

4.25 pm

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to reduce landfill disposal of municipal and special wastes and to control the location of landfill sites; to require the assessment of the impact of proposed landfill sites on public health, the local economy and the environment; and for connected purposes.

Last autumn, my Countryside Protection (Landfill and Opencast Mining) Bill was given a First Reading. It made provision for a presumption against landfill sites and opencast mines in open countryside. Subsequent announcements by the Government have answered some of the concerns that led me to bring that legislation before the House. Just two weeks ago today, tougher regulations in minerals planning guidance 3 on opencast mining were introduced. I welcome them as they resolve most of my worries about opencasting.

However, a major problem covered by my earlier Bill remains, and is tackled by this Bill. Former mining constituencies such as mine, with a long history of mineral workings, are especially vulnerable to continued planning applications for opencasting and quarrying, which is sometimes linked to a more damaging activity. Opencast mines have an even uglier and more dangerous sibling: landfill sites.

The House will be aware of the study published last summer in *The Lancet* on a possible link between birth defects and certain types of landfill site. The report said:

"Women who live within 3 km of hazardous waste landfill sites have a 33 per cent. higher risk of having babies with birth defects."

I recognise that the statistical link between toxic landfill sites and the increased incidence of congenital malformations, cancers and cases of Down's syndrome in people living close to them is not necessarily a causal link, but there is sufficient epidemiological evidence to cause political concern.

I welcome the Imperial college statistical survey commissioned by the Government into the patterns of ill health around landfill sites. However, the conclusions of that study are still some years away. Precautionary legislative measures cannot wait that long. The unborn child must not be made to pay for our inadequate planning.

The presence of landfill sites close to local communities raises numerous health, economic, environmental and social issues. Just weeks ago, Leicestershire county council, in a panic about the shortage of landfill capacity, sold the environment of a village in my constituency for a generation. It allowed a huge refuse tip to be placed at the heart of our national forest. The Government office for the east midlands stood idly by, despite the fact that the application was outside national planning guidelines.

I am certain that what is happening to people living in that Leicestershire hamlet of Boothorpe is a fundamental breach of their human rights. Such injustice is echoed in many other places in our country. People's main concern is that old landfill sites are environmental nightmares, and new landfill sites are often as rigorously controlled as Chernobyl. All sites leak pollutants such as methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas, into the surrounding environment, or they leach out into the water table.

Landfill sites are still in operation despite the much tougher planning regime I propose, and my Bill would force their operators to meet the wider social costs incurred. It would ensure adequate compensation to communities and individuals who suffer. A compensation regime would deter business and industry from creating landfill sites. Money talks and business listens: voters talk and Governments must be made to listen.

I believe that the Government are listening. They are reviewing their strategy on waste. Their vision incorporates seven key commitments. They propose more recycling and energy recovery. That sounds fine, but let us not ignore the problems. Are incinerators huge and expensive one-stop solutions to a modern society's waste problems—throw them into the oven and, hey presto, they are gone? Not quite. They have three main byproducts: heat, fly ash and air pollution, the last two of which can cause significant environmental problems in their own right.

The Government propose increased public involvement in re-use and recycling of household waste, including perhaps charging for waste disposal. We need challenging and realistic targets. In theory at least, 80 per cent. of waste is recyclable, whereas in reality the national recycling rate is less than 10 per cent. Most other developed nations have far higher rates.

The Government intend to place a strong emphasis on waste minimalisation, and on the need to change the perception of the waste hierarchy. They propose a more creative use of economic incentives and the possible use of landfill tax revenues to fund recycling. They want increased public involvement in the decision-making process, which is a crucial requirement that is tackled by my Bill. I look forward to the announcement about the consultation, which is due very soon.

My modest Bill aims to identify a way ahead for the Government in certain respects. My county council, Leicestershire, is to hold a public inquiry on its waste land later this year. The plan, like others being drafted throughout the country, will define the future direction of waste policy in our area. The big question is: will the council opt for a recycling-led or an incineration-led policy? It is vital for it to get that right, and to avoid like the plague—I use that term advisedly—the use of landfill.

There are those who argue that anti-landfill campaigners are premature or alarmist. I do not accept that. These are great matters, and the public deserve greater reassurance. We want to ensure that landfill disease is not the next BSE.

This, then, is my charter for the healthy disposal of waste. The Bill proposes the establishment of a national landfill policy, consistent with human rights legislation; the banning of new landfill sites within 2 km of residential property; and the closure of existing sites of that kind within a year, or voluntary and compensated relocation of affected residents; an independent inquiry into the failures of landfill regulation, especially the conduct of the Environment Agency and waste planning authorities; independent and continuous monitoring of pollutants and notifiable diseases, the data being freely published to all interested parties; a ban on the granting of permission for, and the immediate closure of, landfill sites where there will be, or has been, a detrimental effect on public health; more Government-sponsored scientific research into the

causes of landfill diseases and prevention methods; and compensation for victims, such as children with Down's syndrome or other disabilities.

My Bill proposes the establishment of waste planning authorities to obtain independent health and environmental impact assessments, and a local economic analysis as part of the determination of applications. It proposes the setting up of an independent regulatory body for the planning, licensing and monitoring of landfill sites. It also proposes the full implementation of European waste management, landfill and pollution control directives, and a major review of the Government's hierarchy of waste disposal methods. It proposes a cumulative annual 5 per cent. reduction in biodegradable tonnage going to landfill, with the figure reaching zero by 2020. That is more ambitious than the European directive, under which 35 per cent. will still be landfilled.

In the Palace of Westminster this afternoon there has been a major national lobby, bringing together individuals and groups concerned about the impact of landfill sites on health and human rights. People have travelled here from all over the country; many have come from mining areas such as mine in north-west Leicestershire. The voices of individuals protesting alone are often lost in the winds of indifference, but the voices of campaigning communities can give landfill operators pause for thought, and the voice of a national lobby demanding change must spur Government into action.

Today's protest was called "Community Lobby Opposing Unhealthy Tips"—CLOUT. These communities now have clout, and they are starting to use it. As a Back-Bench MP, I may have relatively little clout, but in introducing my Bill I hope to bring to the attention of a wider audience the concerns with which many who are near such tips must live on a daily basis.

Government can act; indeed, Government must act. I submit that my proposals could form the basis for such action. They are worth while, workable and long overdue, and I commend them to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Taylor, Mr. Tony Benn, Liz Blackman, Mr. Peter Bradley, Mr. Jim Cunningham, Mr. Phil Hope, Judy Mallaber, Dr. Nick Palmer, Mr. Andrew Reed, Mr. Alan Simpson, Mr. Dennis Skinner and Mr. Mark Todd.

COMMUNITY PROTECTION (LANDFILL)

Mr. David Taylor accordingly presented a Bill to reduce landfill disposal of municipal and special wastes and to control the location of landfill sites; to require the assessment of the impact of proposed landfill sites on public health, the local economy and the environment; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 July, and to be printed [Bill 81].

Orders of the Day

Health Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I inform the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I remind the House that there will be a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches throughout the debate.

4.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is an important part of the Government's strategy to build a modern and dependable health service to serve the people of this country in the new century. That is what we promised at the general election and it is a promise that we are keeping.

The national health service that we inherited was in danger. It had about it an air of inexorable decline. The Conservatives had introduced a competitive internal market, which set doctor against doctor and hospital against hospital. Their misguided introduction of a commercial approach to health care was a costly failure. It shifted funds from patient care to bureaucracy and corroded both the ethics of the medical professions and the philosophy of working together, on which the health service was founded. It also resulted in a two-tier system for patients.

That the NHS survived owes nothing to the Tory Ministers involved and everything to the hard work of NHS staff the length and breadth of the country. Despite their valiant efforts, the NHS that we inherited was in trouble. Between them, health authorities and trusts had deficits totalling £460 million. Waiting lists were at an all-time high and rising. Capital investment was at its lowest for a decade. The Tory Government had stopped collecting details of pay, so that they could claim that a national minimum wage would bankrupt the NHS. They were not trying to manage the NHS; they had not bothered to find out even how many intensive care beds there were.

As was revealed in the reports that I commissioned into the scandals in Kent and Canterbury and Devon and Exeter, the standard of breast cancer and cervical screening was not being monitored. The Tory Government had paid £33 million in fees to lawyers and accountants to develop a private finance initiative, but not a single hospital had been started. Highly qualified staff were left to work in rundown buildings, often let down by equipment that failed them. There was a shortage of nurses, but, rather than tackling it, the Tories denied that it existed and reduced the number of nurses who were being trained.

Assaults on NHS staff were, so the staff said, getting worse, but the then Government did not do anything about it: they could not be bothered even to collect the figures. The private health care sector, which is so dear to the Tories, went virtually unregulated. Mixed-sex wards continued to make life a misery for many patients. In many parts of the country, NHS dentists virtually disappeared.

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

The development of information technology systems in the health service was years behind that in many other services and industries. NHS computing was best known for scandalous waste on systems that did not work. Nor was there any long-term strategy to make things better.

Health professionals had been ignored. The Tory Government had done little to help the profession's strength and self-regulation to raise standards and to benefit patients. Careers were held back and pay held down by archaic grading systems.

The Tories denied that the increasing wealth gap between the best off and worst off had increased a health gap between rich and poor individuals and rich and poor neighbours. Ministers banned the use of the words "health inequalities."

In deference to their commercial paymasters, the Tories had refused to ban tobacco advertising. They had helped to form a blocking minority to prevent the introduction of a Europe-wide directive to counter the promotion of cigarettes. Millions of pounds were being stolen from the NHS through prescription fraud. Millions of pounds more that were legally owed to the NHS by road traffic accident insurers were not being collected, so the new Government who were elected on 1 May 1997 had a lot to do.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No; I will get on.

The new Government had a lot to do, not just to start to put things right, but to lay the foundations for a modern and dependable health service for the new century.

We set out in a White Paper our proposals to create a new NHS. We followed that up with further detailed papers that spelt out how we intended to go about it. We published a 10-year strategy to bring information technology in the NHS up to date. We have spelt out our proposals to modernise social services and mental health services. We have published a Green Paper on how we propose to improve public health.

We have not only said what we intend to do, we have got on with it. For a start, we have invested extra money in the health service. In our first year, we provided an extra £300 million on top of the budget that we inherited. In the year just ended, we invested £2 billion more than the previous Government had planned to spend.

Over the next three years, as announced in the comprehensive spending review, we shall invest an extra £21 billion, giving the NHS a much bigger annual increase than the 3 per cent. per annum for which all the experts and our opponents had called. The three-year settlement will enable the NHS to plan ahead, in a way which proved impossible in the short-term world of annual settlements.

Mr. Lansley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: As you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have announced that so many hon. Members—primarily Labour Members—wish to speak in the debate, I should like to get on with it, so that no one will be excluded.

In the previous year, £500 million of that extra money was targeted on reducing waiting lists. We promised, by the end of March 1999, to get waiting lists below the figure that we inherited; we did that, and more, by the end of February.

In the year just ended, making good use of the extra funds that this Government found, the dedicated staff of the NHS have carried out an extra 460,000 waiting-list operations, and dealt with 140,000 extra emergency cases and 150,000 extra first out-patient appointments. That is not to mention the tens of thousands of extra people who have needed an out-patient check-up after their in-patient operation. In the coming year, a further £320 million will be earmarked to bring waiting lists down further, and also to deal with many more out-patients and emergencies and to pilot the introduction of booked admissions systems across the NHS.

To help deal with the shortage of nurses, we have implemented the Nurses and Midwives Pay Review Body's recommendations—nationally and in full, for the first time in five years—giving all nurses an increase of at least 4.7 per cent., newly qualified nurses 12 per cent., and 70,000 lower-paid nurses at least 8 per cent. Consequently, two thirds of all qualified nurses are now paid £20,000 or more a year.

We have mounted a very successful national nursing campaign, which has had 53,000 responses. More than 5,000 of the responses were from nurses asking about returning to the NHS. Many of them require refresher courses because they have been out of nursing for more than three years; those courses are being provided free. At least 450 former nurses are already back at work in the NHS because of the initiative that we have taken, and 2,000 extra student nurses are already in training.

We have provided for extra payments for nurses and other professionals at the top of their grade. In consultation with staff representatives, we propose to replace the current rigid grading systems with ones that reward people for the responsibilities that they take on.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We heard all that in the Queen's Speech. Are we going to hear anything about the Health Bill itself?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As hon. Members are aware, we are allowed a fairly wide-ranging debate on Second Reading.

Mr. Dobson: Opposition Members are so eager to hear our common-sense proposals that they cannot be bothered to hold back for even a moment. They need to know the background to our proposals in the Bill, and that is what they are going to get.

We shall remove the barriers that are holding back the careers of many nurses and other professionals and holding down their pay. We are also negotiating with doctors on a new consultants' contract and providing better conditions for junior doctors.

We promised to sort out the Tory mess in the private finance initiative, and we have. We passed a short Bill to clarify the law, and we have launched the biggest hospital-building programme in the history of the NHS, with 15 new hospitals already being built and 16 more on the way. A thousand GP premises are being modernised,

and we are modernising every accident and emergency department that needs it. We are also using lottery money to help provide newer and more reliable equipment, such has scanners and linear accelerators for the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

All that investment will not only help patients and staff, but create jobs in construction, manufacturing and service industries. We have already diverted funds from the bureaucracy of fundholding into breast cancer facilities. In response to the scandals that arose under the Tories, we have set new standards in breast and cervical cancer screening, and put machinery in place to make sure that those standards are met—something that the trio of former Secretaries of State for Health who are on the Opposition Benches today never managed to get round to.

We have invested £350 million this year in replacing unreliable equipment, both to help patients and to reduce the frustration of staff. With the support of the British Medical Association, we have replaced the divisions between fundholding and non-fundholding GPs with primary care groups, on which all GPs, as well as nurses, the social services and lay members, are represented. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the medical profession for its voluntary agreement to share decision making in primary care with those other groups.

The Tory amendment refers to the popularity of fundholding, but many fundholders were reluctant participants in the scheme. Even before the Bill has been passed, only 46 of the 3,383 fundholding practices have opted to remain in the scheme. Only 1.4 per cent. have taken what the Tory amendment calls the "popular option". If the Tories think that something chosen by 1.4 per cent. is popular, we can see why they are doing so well in the polls.

The Bill provides for primary care groups to progress to becoming primary care trusts, with wider powers and duties to provide and arrange treatment and care for patients. It will abolish fundholding, and thus reduce the bureaucracy arising from commissioning organisations by replacing them with 481 primary care groups, and replacing annual contracts with longer-term service agreements.

The Bill will give all the national health service organisations a duty of co-operation, in place of the competition that the Tories tried to force on them. It will also require them to co-operate with local councils, and change the law to allow the NHS and local councils to pool budgets and carry further the practical co-operation that they have been putting into practice since the general election.

The legal changes will remove the last obstacles to those bodies working together to provide joint services for local people—for example, helping old people at home to avoid their having to go into hospital unnecessarily, and allowing them to come out of hospital safely when they have recovered.

The Bill will also oblige health authorities, in co-operation with the rest of the health service, and with local councils, voluntary organisations and others, to prepare health improvement programmes to identify the health care needs of their areas and then set about meeting those needs.

Once the Bill becomes law, NHS trusts will be obliged to have in place systems to monitor and improve both the quality of treatment that patients receive and the outcome of that treatment. That obligation has never existed before, and it will augment what the professions have been trying to do. To help them in that process, the Bill also contains provisions to modernise and strengthen the self-regulation of the clinical professions.

What we propose follows extensive consultation with the professions. After Government amendments made in the House of Lords, the Bill commands the support of the relevant professional bodies. Until now, most changes to the arrangements for the self-regulation of health care professions have required primary legislation, which has led to enormous delays and consequent frustration. The Bill will make most changes possible through Orders in Council rather than primary legislation.

The Bill will also make it possible to meet the aspirations of the professions allied to medicine, and bring into the self-regulatory arrangements a number of professions that are not now legally regulated. All matters central to self-regulation will, rightly, remain with the professional bodies—professional registers, standards of education, guidance on professional conduct and fitness to practise.

All our initiatives are intended to improve the quality of treatment and care. The main aim of better training, continuous professional development, the professional revalidation now being introduced by the General Medical Council and clinical governance is not to expose failure, but to reduce the number of problems that arise and to deal with them in good time so that matters can be put right before patients suffer. We want no more Bristol scandals and no more need for public inquiries.

In that spirit, the Bill provides for the establishment of a Commission for Health Improvement to carry out regular independent reviews and investigations and to offer advice and help to health service trusts in their efforts to deliver top-quality care. The system is designed to contribute to improving the NHS.

An amendment was passed in the House of Lords to extend the commission's duties to cover private acute hospitals. They certainly need to be properly regulated, but the Commission for Health Improvement is not designed to do the job. Under the previous Government, private hospitals were treated as private nursing homes for regulatory purposes. At the election we promised to introduce independent regulation of all residential care. When we do that, we shall need to make special—probably separate—arrangements to regulate private acute hospitals. We shall consult on that shortly.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that his right hon. Friend Baroness Jay told me, in the presence of her civil servants, that it was no part of the function of the national health service to regulate the private sector?

Mr. Dobson: And my right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is not a function of the national health service to regulate the private health care sector, it is a Government function, and we should distinguish between them here and now. If an NHS body was responsible, the first time that it criticised a private hospital or said that something was wrong, some bleating Tories would leap up and say that it was prejudiced.

At the election, we promised to establish independent regulation of all residential care, and we shall. The body that regulates private hospitals will need to license the

[Mr. Dobson]

hospitals, act as a registrar, have a right of access to carry out regular inspections, publish inspection reports and enforce any licence conditions that have been laid down for the protection of the public. As the Commission for Health Improvement will not have any of those powers, it is unlikely to be suitable for the role. Action is clearly necessary to prevent a recurrence of the situation that, as the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) knows, arose in Kent under the Tories when a gynaecologist who had been banned from the NHS for sub-standard work was able to continue to practise at private hospitals.

The Bill also deals with shortcomings in the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, which sets the price of drugs used by the NHS. Some companies were refusing to comply with the existing scheme. The estimated cost to the NHS was £30 million a year and rising. Under our proposals the scheme will remain voluntary, but the Bill provides powers to make all concerned comply with the terms of the voluntary agreement. That is fair to the taxpayer and to the majority of pharmaceutical companies, which have always met their obligations under the scheme.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) *rose—*

Mr. Dobson: Before anyone leaps up to defend the pharmaceutical industry, I must point out that the Bill, as amended by the Government in the Lords, meets the requirements of the industry. The reputable companies are satisfied with what we are proposing, because they are as sick to death as we are of the freeloaders who are not playing the game. The Tories support the freeloaders who do not play the game. I am confident that the renegotiated PPRS and the new legal powers will offer a good way forward for that highly successful industry, the NHS and the taxpayer.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dob[illegible]

The Bill [illegible]des new powers to help tackle fraud against the NHS by a small minority of patients and practitioners at the expense of the honest majority. It also modernises the framework under which trusts operate. That reflects their status as public sector organisations. High-security hospitals will become NHS trusts.

Our approach is to set quality standards nationally, deliver improvements locally and monitor performance externally. That is why, with the support of the professions, we set up the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, to provide authoritative guidance to all parts of the NHS on the effectiveness and value of new treatments.

We are introducing national service frameworks to set national standards and spell out the models of treatment and care that should be provided in every part of the country for particular conditions or groups of patients. The first national service frameworks will cover coronary heart disease and mental health, followed by one covering the treatment and care of older people and then one covering diabetes.

Placing a duty of clinical governance on NHS trusts will help to deliver improvements locally. The Commission for Health Improvement will provide the external monitoring, advice and help that will be needed if targets are to be achieved.

Mr. Bercow: I am sure that the Secretary of State would not want in any way to give incorrect information to the House. He said that the pharmaceutical industry was entirely content with his proposals to revise the voluntary scheme. Why, then, is the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry objecting to several clauses, and not least to clause 30 because it does not provide explicit criteria or any express requirement of reasonableness?

Mr. Dobson: The association said that the changes made in the House of Lords have, by and large, met the needs of the industry, and so they have. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. yapper wants to do something useful, I suggest that he gets on the Standing Committee and tables amendments to deal with the companies that have not been complying with the terms of the PPRS.

By our extra investment, we are ensuring that the effectiveness of staff is not undermined by out-of-date equipment. We are determined that in future the excellence of staff will be matched by top-quality buildings and reliable, up-to-date equipment and pharmaceuticals. Nothing less will do, for patients or for staff.

We are committed to investing £1 billion in a long-term strategy to provide the NHS with a top-quality information technology system that works, and to develop an electronic record for every patient that can be accessed by all professionals who need to use it. That way, GPs, practice and community nurses, accident and emergency staff, out-patient clinics, hospital specialists and, eventually, even ambulance paramedics can have access to a reliable, accurate, up-to-date picture of the health record of every patient who comes their way.

All those improvements in treatment and care are being developed with resources from the modernisation fund that we established as part of the comprehensive spending review. That fund is financing the rapid development of NHS Direct, a 24-hour nurse-led helpline that has proved an enormous success in the three pilot schemes that have now run for more than a year in the north-east, in north Lancashire and in Buckinghamshire.

NHS Direct now covers roughly 40 per cent. of the country, and by December it will cover 60 per cent. It provides a popular service, especially for older people and young parents. Some 97 per cent. of the users surveyed were satisfied with the service. At my insistence, it offers opportunities for trained nurses who, because of injury, have had to give up work, to use their skills again for the benefit of patients and for their own job satisfaction. I was delighted that several nurses in that group had been taken on by NHS Direct in west Yorkshire, which I visited last week, including one paraplegic nurse in a wheelchair who now feels that there is some purpose back in her life.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I appreciate the good intentions of NHS Direct and of the scheme that has been announced today, but the Secretary of State must be aware that it can be difficult to give accurate information without physically examining a patient. Members of Parliament often get complaints from patients who have

received misadvice over the telephone from GP deputising services. How does he intend to cover the doctors and nurses who give information, and is he worried that there may be misdiagnoses?

Mr. Dobson: All the evidence is that it is possible for the finest, most expert clinician, doctor or nurse to give a misdiagnosis face to face. I do not suggest that it is easy to give a diagnosis over the telephone, and other problems arise from that situation, but diagnosis is a relatively imprecise science, or art, at the best of times. The cover that we provide for NHS Direct staff is the same indemnity that is provided for any employed member of the NHS staff. We will clear up any difficulties that arise from advice being given over the telephone which are discovered when the patient visits a GP.

Some people, including some in the medical profession, expressed doubts about diagnosis over the telephone. In Preston and Chorley, where the scheme has been running for a year, the distinguished director of nursing is using the protocols used by the local NHS Direct scheme for training nurses to work in the accident and emergency department because, she tells me, those protocols are more rigorous than anything that has been used in the past. She knows what she is talking about because she has been involved in the project from the start. I repeat that 97 per cent. of the users are satisfied with the service.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): The real issue in giving telephone advice is not so much whether it is right or wrong, but when it is appropriate to advise the patient to take other action. I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that advice given over the telephone could include a recommendation to the patient to see a doctor face to face, or a decision to send an ambulance to take the patient to an A and E department. Provided the person at the end of the telephone is trained correctly in decision making, there should be no problem.

Mr. Dobson: I almost entirely agree with my hon. Friend, but something will always go wrong. Things go wrong in every bit of the health care system and always will, but through training and substantial effort we can keep problems to a minimum. If someone gets through to the nurse, sometimes they are given reassurance and sometimes they are given advice. Sometimes that advice includes a warning to see a doctor straight away and sometimes a warning to attend A and E as soon as possible. Occasionally, the advice is to stay and wait for the ambulance that is being sent. Generally speaking, most of the clinicians in those parts of the country with an NHS Direct scheme are highly satisfied with the arrangements. That is why several areas are asking for NHS Direct to extend its functions beyond the 24-hour line.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): No one doubts that even the best diagnosis can go wrong—quod erat demonstrandum. That is not the issue. The issue is whether the Secretary of State accepts—and if not, why not—that if advice is given by somebody who does not know the patient or his history, there is an increased risk of that advice being wrong. The issue is not whether family doctors who give advice face to face are infallible; it is whether there is an increased risk of getting the advice wrong if the person giving it has never dealt with the patient before.

Mr. Dobson: Clearly, it is best if the patient is in front of the person giving the advice and that that person has the patient's full medical history and is able to carry out some tests. However, that is not what NHS Direct offers—it provides telephone advice and help and, in some cases, an urgent attention service. In that respect, it is similar to many out-of-hours services where doctors do not have the records of the patients with whom they are dealing.

It might not be ideal, but NHS Direct is immensely popular with the public and it would be best if people did not attempt to run it down, because they are running down a large number of highly skilled people—top-quality nurses, advised in some cases by doctors, and good managements—who have taken this opportunity to provide a new additional service as well as everything else provided by the NHS. In some parts of the country, the service is being extended—at the request of general practitioners, so they obviously have faith in it—to provide a gateway to GP services, social services and mental health services.

As well as taking incoming calls, the nurses can also be used to ring out. Pilot schemes are being introduced in which, during troughs in the number of incoming calls, nurses can ring out to remind patients about out-patient appointments; about the availability of flu jabs; to remind women of appointments for cancer screening; or to check whether a patient, recently discharged from hospital, is okay. Like NHS Direct, all those things go with the grain of what health care staff are already developing locally.

Today, in Birmingham, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister invited primary care groups to suggest proposals for 20 pilot schemes to develop fast access NHS walk-in centres in towns and cities throughout the country, open from early morning until late at night and at weekends, to provide information—

Miss Widdecombe: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am aware of your previous ruling that Second Reading debates may go wide, but we have now spent a considerable amount of time hearing about issues that are not part of the Bill. The Secretary of State has spent about 10 minutes on NHS Direct and that has nothing to do with the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already explained that the debate on Second Reading can range very widely and I am sure that the Secretary of State will come to the Bill quite soon.

Mr. Dobson: The right hon. Lady realises that I shall be moving on to matters that she wants to talk about. However, one of the problems is that she does not want to talk about success stories in the national health service; they deeply upset her. The Tories can never make their minds up. When I stood at the Dispatch Box about a month ago to announce the extension of NHS Direct, they welcomed it, but they have now returned to carping mode.

[Mr. Dobson]

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister invited primary care groups to put forward proposals for 20 pilot schemes to develop fast access NHS walk-in centres in towns and cities throughout the country, open from early morning until late at night and at weekends. They will provide information and advice and will treat minor conditions without appointment. Some will be located next to existing accident and emergency departments and others will be in shopping centres. They, too, are intended to go with the grain of local developments and we shall work with primary care groups and primary care trusts—*[Interruption.]*—which are in the Bill, to set them up and run them. The trouble is that the Opposition know so little about the health service that they did not realise that the primary care groups and trusts would be involved.

The Health Bill changes the law to speed up that process. It restores to health professionals opportunities to exercise their clinical judgment, curtailed or taken away by the Tories. It widens the choice open to patients to obtain the most appropriate treatment. it continues the process of reducing unnecessary and expensive bureaucracy in the health service. It will create a stable structure in which a modern and dependable health service can be provided and developed. It puts in place a system for managing the NHS that makes clear who is responsible for quality and performance in every part of the health service. It also makes sure that NHS performance at all levels is properly monitored to secure high standards in every part of the country.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dobson: No.

Our national health service has served our country for 50 years. It is the most popular institution in Britain, partly because the people working in it do such a good job and partly because it is a practical demonstration of the benefits of working together. British people are not just pleased that the NHS is there to look after them—they gain deep satisfaction from knowing that it will look after all of us.

We promised to stop the rot in the NHS, and we have done that. It is not enough, however, just to save the NHS. We are reversing decline and making sure the service's prospects are bright. The British people want to experience a new, modern and dependable NHS that can give easier and quicker access to the top-quality treatment and care that they need, and that draws on new technology to update the best of the old ways of doing things and to develop new ways of providing what patients need when and where they need it.

That huge undertaking will take a long time to fulfil. It will require leadership and it will depend on professional support. It will require the active involvement of Government, business, local councils, voluntary organisations and individuals, as well as of people working in the NHS. I am convinced that it is the way ahead if we want to make sure that the NHS in the new century will retain, renew and enhance its world renown for fairness, efficiency and quality.

The Bill is sound common sense. Only a fool would oppose it.

5.11 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Health Bill *[Lords]* because it removes choice from both patients and healthcare professionals over appropriate treatment; it removes the highly successful and popular option of fund-holding for family doctors; it imposes unnecessary and expensive bureaucracy and creates further upheaval in the Health Service, which is already under considerable strain; it undermines the competitiveness of the British pharmaceutical industry; and it centralises power in the hands of the Secretary of State, giving him arbitrary authority over the running of the Health Service without sufficient reference to Parliament.

I could not help feeling sorry for the Secretary of State for Health as he rose to move the Second Reading. There is so little of worth in the Bill that he had to use his whole speech to talk about matters that have nothing to do with it. His must have been the most inadequate presentation of a Bill that I have witnessed during my time in Parliament.

The Bill, which I, at least, will discuss, does nothing to address the fundamental problems that have existed in our health service since the time of Bevan. We have a three-tier health service. On the top tier are those who receive national health service treatment or who choose to go to the private sector because that is what they want.

On the second tier are those who do not receive NHS treatment, either because of excessive delays—the number of those waiting more than 12 months has doubled since the Government came to power—or because treatment is not available. Those people do not choose to go to the private sector, but can, sometimes at considerable personal sacrifice, choose the private alternative if they have to. In that category, I include people such as those who have sold their houses to buy beta interferon.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I shall go through the three tiers, and then I shall give way.

It is clear that the second tier is being failed, but the third tier is wholly dispossessed. It contains people who cannot receive NHS treatment, either through excessive delays or through unavailability of operations, and who, even if they do not eat, cannot afford to go private.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I shall in a moment.

Not a single thing in the Bill addresses the problems of the totally dispossessed. On the contrary, the Bill will increase the number of dispossessed, because one of its consistent themes is rationing.

I have promised to give way to two hon. Members. Unlike the Secretary of State, I shall have the courtesy to give way to Back Benchers from time to time.

Mr. Leslie: It will be a short intervention. Does the right hon. Lady have private medical insurance?

Miss Widdecombe: The right hon. Lady does have private medical insurance.

Dr. Desmond Turner: There is much truth in what the right hon. Lady says, but does she agree that the reasons

for the health inequalities that she has described are inherent in the system of, for instance, fundholding GPs, for which her Government were responsible, and in the structural problems that her Government built into the health service?

Miss Widdecombe: The exact opposite is true. I am not claiming and I have never claimed—in the House or outside it—that we created a perfect health service. There are problems in the health service, which the Government would be wise to acknowledge. If the Government acknowledged them, they might address them.

Mr. Ivan Lewis (Bury, South) *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I am already answering an intervention. I was asked whether fundholding increased the inequalities and led to the dispossession that I have been outlining.

That dispossession has been a feature of the NHS under successive Governments, because the NHS has not yet found a way—in my view, it will not find a way until we consider some real innovation—of being able to do it all. However, fundholding enabled a doctor to say to a dispossessed patient, "You may not be able to get that treatment here, but I can send you elsewhere to get it." There should have been a levelling up so that every patient had a fundholding doctor, but the Bill levels down and will ensure that no patients have fundholding doctors. When it comes to a choice of treatment, patients will have a choice of one.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I will presently, but a stack of people are queueing to intervene. I shall address the points as they come.

The Secretary of State is so amused by the plight of the dispossessed that he is sitting there laughing. I hope that the patients who are watching this debate today because they hope that something may come out of it for them will have observed the Secretary of State and those on the Benches behind him laughing, and will understand that nothing that the Secretary of State is doing will help the dispossessed. All that the Secretary of State and his junior Ministers have done in their time in office is to deny that rationing exists.

Mr. Ivan Lewis *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I said that I would give way presently. I shall not forget the hon. Gentleman. He need not give the impression of a jack-in-the-box; I know that he is in the queue, but he can wait.

As I was saying, the Bill does nothing for the dispossessed. It is well known that the Secretary of State has never yet managed to look me in the eyes when I—oh, he is getting into practice. After the implementation of the Bill, he will have a great deal of difficulty looking the nation in the eyes. In fact, if one looks into the eyes of those behind him, one can already see the beginnings of a terrible doubt about what Labour is doing to the health service. Labour Members' mouths may move in tune with their pagers, but their eyes say something rather different. Their eyes say that they are beginning to realise that the Secretary of State does not have some magic solution to enable the NHS to meet every need. I am careful to say "need", not "demand".

Mr. Lewis *rose—*

Dr. Stoate *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I am going to give way to the jack-in-the-box first.

Mr. Lewis: I shall address my intervention to the dispossessed on the Conservative Benches. How will the dispossessed, or, indeed, anyone else using the NHS benefit from a significant increase in the number of people using private health care, which is the alternative strategy that the right hon. Lady and her party have articulated of late? Roughly what proportion of the population currently using the health service does she believe should be encouraged by a responsible Government to ditch the health service and use the private sector?

Miss Widdecombe: If the hon. Gentleman would examine what I am proposing instead of being overwhelmed by his own propaganda, he would find that I am not suggesting what he suggests. Any future Conservative Government will continue to increase in real terms, year on year, spending on the health service. There is no question of using the private sector as a substitute for the health service. I admit that no matter how much extra the Secretary of State, I, or anybody else tries to spend on the health service, it will not be able to do it all. In addition to increased spending on the health service, I want a real injection of fresh, new resources into the health service from the private sector.

Mr. Lewis *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman; I am answering his question.

Dr. Stoate: On that point—

Miss Widdecombe: Sit down! *[Interruption.]* Not you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Labour Members can sit down and stay sitting down while I work through this point. The dispossessed—

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead) *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: Sit! Perhaps it would help if I said that I shall make progress before taking any further interventions. That might save Labour Members a considerable amount of exercise. I ask them to stay seated for a while.

I have already said that the dispossessed are not helped by the Bill. What does the Secretary of State intend to do to assist the dispossessed? According to the Bill, he intends to increase rationing. The theme of the Bill is that we shall have first, as background, a National Institute for

[Miss Widdecombe]

Clinical Excellence, which will decide on the availability of drugs according to their cost. If the Secretary of State has any doubt about that—

Mr. Austin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in the Bill? Is it relevant to our discussion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for debate.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin) was not listening. I said—and he will see it in *Hansard*—"by way of background". I suggest that he listens a little more and talks less, and then he might understand something. The Bill will follow up NICE with CHIMP—the Commission for Health Improvement, which is in the Bill. I have already said that NICE will ration drugs according to cost; CHIMP will implement that policy.

Furthermore, under primary care groups, there will be, for the first time, cash-limited drugs budgets. If cash-limited drugs budgets are not an aid to rationing, I do not know what is. On top of everything else, the Bill prescribes control of drugs pricing, so that some drugs could be squeezed out altogether.

Let us add all that up. There is NICE, by way of background, CHIMP, which is in the Bill, cash limits for primary care groups and control of drugs pricing. Yet, Ministers have denied twice at the Dispatch Box recently that there is rationing in the health service. What will happen is that the number of dispossessed who cannot afford the private sector and who will not get those drugs from the NHS, and who will not get from the NHS other treatments that NICE may decide are too costly, will actually increase, and they will get nothing at all.

Dr. Stoate: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: No. Will the hon. Gentleman please sit down? He has been told that he will not be successful in his endeavours. I know that doctors like exercise, but I ask him to stay sitting down.

The Government make their proposals against a background of failure and incompetent management of the health service. First, they have said that they are spending record levels on the health service, and that somehow, that will meet all the problems of the health service—that a Secretary of State with a bit of good will and a bit of extra cash is all that we need to address the fundamental issue of squaring need and supply in the health service.

The Secretary of State is very fond of saying that he is spending an extra £21 billion. Let us look at the Treasury Red Book and the Government's own figures, which show that expenditure in 1997-98 was £34.688 billion, and that in 2001-02, it is proposed to be £45.179 billion. Most people who have reached even 11-plus standard could work out that that difference is not £21 billion, but less than £11 billion; that that less than £11 billion represents a real-terms increase of 3.8 per cent.; and that, in the five years preceding those figures, the real-terms increase was 3.8 per cent.

The Secretary of State is very fond of saying that the real-terms increase for the three years from 1998 to 2001 is 4.7 per cent. and is a record, but it is not; because between 1990 and 1993, the real-terms increase was 5.6 per cent. That clearly shows that it is impossible to solve all the problems of the health service on money that has increased less in real terms than has been tried in the past.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I do not doubt the right hon. Lady's figures, but does she accept that the only reason that the Government, during their first term in office, will spend less than the previous Conservative Government's record, is that, for two years, the present Government stuck to the very low, even miserly, real-terms increases in the Conservative spending plans? Further, does she recognise that, as no Government would cut NHS spending in real terms, her commitment—just like the Government's commitment—to raise spending in real terms, which could be just inflation plus £1, is generally meaningless?

Miss Widdecombe: I am afraid that the epidemic of not listening has broken out on the Liberal Democrat Benches as well. If the hon. Gentleman had followed the years that I was quoting, he would have found that I am quoting Labour's spending plans. Therefore, there is no magic, fresh expenditure that will suddenly change everything, and there is nothing in the Bill that will suddenly change everything—and, what is more, people know that.

What does the Bill do? I suppose that it is very good of the Government to propose in the Bill that fundholding be abolished when they have already abolished it. I suppose that it is very good of them to bother to ask for parliamentary consent after the event, but, first and foremost, the Bill abolishes choice, diversity and flexibility. It dragoons general practitioners into massive collectives. Whether their members like it or not, they will have to follow the patterns of referrals and the patterns set down by the committee governing the collective, and they will not have the choice that they would have had as fundholders.

The Secretary of State tried to say that fundholding was not popular. Perhaps he will tell us, then, why, when we made fundholding entirely voluntary and did not dragoon anyone into it, 60 per cent. of GPs were fundholders, or had applications outstanding to become fundholders, at the time that we left office. If fundholding was so unpopular, why did 60 per cent. of GPs actively join it or want to join it when there was no compulsion, as there would be if the Bill were passed?

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: No. I have made it clear that I am making progress. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State said at one stage this afternoon that he wanted to get on; by the time that he sat down, we were still waiting for him to get on to the Bill. I have at least tried to address the issues in the Bill. I shall now address some of the background about which the Secretary of State made such a performance in his presentation.

First, waiting lists are not falling. The number of people waiting to see a consultant has increased by 222,000 since the Government came to office. That is not just a statistic because until people have seen a consultant, the urgency

of their need for an operation cannot possibly be assessed. The Secretary of State has presided over a situation in which keeping down the list of those waiting to have their operation has been achieved by slowing down the rate at which patients enter the list, and by having a massive increase of nearly 250,000 patients waiting to discover whether they can get on to the list in the first place.

When I raise these matters, the Secretary of State has two or three defences. First, he says, "That may be true, but the numbers on out-patient waiting lists were increasing under the Conservatives." According to figures published by the previous Government—published in exactly the same way as the right hon. Gentleman publishes figures—there were 264,000 people waiting to see a consultant in September 1996 and 247,000—a fall—in March 1997. From the 247,000 that we left the right hon. Gentleman, he has increased the number to 468,000.

The second defence that the right hon. Gentleman often advances is, "Yes, it is true that the numbers are increasing, but it is also true that we are treating more patients." It is true that more patients are being treated, but it is true also that in 1995–96, we Conservatives were treating 4 million more patients than we had been in 1979. The increase was not a few tens of thousands. Even that increase did not solve all the problems. It did not eliminate all the lists and it did not get rid of waiting times. The fact that more patients are being treated under the right hon. Gentleman proves nothing other than that ever since its inception, the national health service has quite regularly increased the number of patients treated. The right hon. Gentleman is not addressing the problem of the increase of 250,000 people who are waiting to see their consultant in the first place.

The third defence is, "The problem has nothing to do with the waiting list initiative", but it has. I shall quote from a letter that has been circulated to all consultants in the Salisbury health care NHS trust from the chief executive, who writes:

"Despite having made good progress . . . waiting list numbers rose . . . by some 200 more than anticipated."

He adds:

"To achieve our year end target . . . we need to reduce our current waiting list numbers"

by about 500. He states that

"there are only three realistic options"

The first option is:

"Reduce the numbers coming onto the list."

That is clearly set out. That is the way in which the numbers on lists are reduced. Another option is:

"Use of the private sector."

That is a commendable option.

If the reduction in the number on waiting lists means that people who have been waiting are being treated by the NHS, that is to be welcomed. I have no doubt that some of the fall will have been brought about in that way. However, if it is being achieved by slowing the rate at which people enter the lists, or by people becoming so fed up that they go to the private sector or so ill that they die before receiving treatment, that is not such a wonderful achievement.

Bearing in mind that it was an early pledge to get the lists down to 100,000 below the level that we had left, it has taken the Secretary of State half a Parliament to get down to the level that we left—and with the sort of manipulation that I have been discussing. That is not—

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon) *rose*—

Miss Widdecombe: No, sit down for a moment please. I will not give way for the moment.

That is not a record of which the Secretary—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I say to the right hon. Lady that it will probably be better if she decides whether to take interventions, and indicates clearly whether she will do so or not, and leaves the rest to me?

Miss Widdecombe: Quite so, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will do that.

That is not a record of which the Secretary of State can be proud.

Similarly, I have in front of me a letter from the Southampton general hospital trust saying straightforwardly that the surgical waiting list has trebled

"since the present Government came to power"

The fact is that there is no magic wand solution that will simply reduce waiting lists. There are many ways of manipulating those lists and the statistics, and there are many ways of triumphantly announcing the statistics, but in the end, if a genuine improvement has not been achieved, patients are being betrayed. Also being betrayed are the doctors and the nurses, who are being obliged to apply distorted clinical priorities to assist that manipulation.

Against that background, I would have hoped that the Government would have had the courage to address in the Bill some of those fundamental problems and to have tried to find new, exciting ways of increasing the resources available to the NHS. The Secretary of State says, very proudly, that the private sector must be regulated, but the House of Lords has forced that upon him, through a Conservative amendment that has applied to the private as well as the public sector the health improvement initiatives that he says he is introducing into the Bill.

The Secretary of State boasts that he will have the biggest hospital building programme in history. We had the biggest hospital programme in history. If he achieves his aspiration to outstrip that, I shall be very pleased, but I shall be even more pleased if he acknowledges that he will do that largely through the private finance initiative, which we introduced and set up. That is the use of the private sector.

Mr. Dobson: If the Tories made such a success of the PFI for major hospital projects, why did they never manage to get one started and why, with their agreement, did we have to clarify the law, which they claimed they had clarified previously? They spent £33 million on consultants—not medical consultants, but lawyers, accountants and God knows who—and they never got one hospital built. We are getting 15 hospitals built as a result of sorting out the mess we inherited.

Miss Widdecombe: First, we built more hospitals than ever before in British history. Secondly, when we set up

[Miss Widdecombe]

the PFI, the Secretary of State's party opposed it root and branch, although it has now decided that it is the only way forward. Yes, when we set up the PFI, we had difficulties, which the then Opposition were not willing to help us solve, but we got to a point where they were solved and the PFI was in readiness when the right hon. Gentleman took over.

Why does not the right hon. Gentleman thank us for setting up the PFI? If it is right to use the private sector in that sort of instance, if it is right for consultants to use the private sector to get their lists down and if it is right for certain facilities to be shared with the private sector, why will not he expand that and use the considerable resources of the private sector for the benefit of the NHS?

The problem with the right hon. Gentleman is that his approach to this matter is that of the dinosaur. In every other Department, partnership with the private sector is now a fact of everyday life. In many Departments, it is being extended beyond anything introduced by the Conservative Government. But apparently, uniquely, in health matters, the Secretary of State wants to marginalise the private sector, giving it no major role.

Mr. Bercow: In reflecting upon the Secretary of State's attitude to the Bill, is my right hon. Friend not reminded of a former leader of the Labour party and distinguished parliamentarian, Michael Foot, who, in a conversation some years ago, said, "Don't give me facts, they only serve to confuse my arguments."?

Miss Widdecombe: I am reminded of many things when I look at the Secretary of State, but mostly I am reminded of desperation—sheer desperation. So desperate is he, that he could not even address the Bill when he came to the House to present it. So desperate is he, that he has to manipulate the waiting lists to say that he is moving towards achieving a pledge that was supposed to be achieved early, but, after half a Parliament, is nowhere near being met.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase) *rose—*

Ms Drown *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I have an embarrassment of riches. I shall go for the doctor.

Dr. Wright: I have been listening carefully to the right hon. Lady's remarks and trying to follow them. She gives a terrifying performance. There is certainly something of the fright about her. The right hon. Lady argues that there are dispossessed people whose treatments will be so expensive that the NHS will not be able to afford them. Exactly how will those desperate, dispossessed people be able to obtain treatment somewhere else?

Miss Widdecombe: That is the whole point. The whole point of what we are saying is that, if the private sector shares some of the strain with the NHS, the NHS will be freed up to look after the dispossessed. Instead, the Secretary of State wants to keep them dispossessed, and to increase their number and the range of treatments and drugs from which they are dispossessed. That is the Government's policy. I cannot imagine that it is one of which the hon. Gentleman is proud, but at least now he may understand what I have been saying.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: It might be for your convenience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and for the convenience of the House, if I say that I shall make further progress before giving way. Compared with the Secretary of State, who refused to give way almost consistently throughout his speech, there has been a proper debate from the Conservative Benches today.

The Bill sets up primary care trusts, but it does not even contain a definition of one. The noble Baroness Hayman was rather embarrassed in the other place when she had to say that the Government would work out a definition. The Secretary of State has introduced a Bill setting up primary care trusts with no adequate definition of such trusts. I am not surprised that he does not address a Bill that does not even tell us what it is about.

This is a defective Bill, of which we have had a defective presentation by the Secretary of State. The Government have a defective health policy which has resulted in increasing numbers of dispossessed, manipulated waiting lists, longer waiting lists of people waiting to see a consultant and a winter crisis, yet still the Secretary of State tries to pretend that there is something new, modern and vibrant about the declining NHS over which he presides.

I will not say that the Secretary of State's language has been deceptive throughout, because you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might call me to order, but it has certainly not portrayed an accurate picture. We all remember the right hon. Gentleman standing up in the House in great triumph saying, "I am providing 7,000 extra doctors". Everyone became very excited until he had to admit that they were just the doctors coming through medical school in the usual way, not "extra" at all.

There is nothing extra for any NHS patient in the whole of the Bill. There is nothing extra for any NHS patient in the whole of the Government's health policy. However, there is much less. There is much less choice for a patient's general practitioner to refer outside the area or to particular consultants.

Mr. Dobson: That is not true.

Miss Widdecombe: It is true, because whereas a fundholding GP could have decided that course of action for himself, a member of a primary care group will be able to do so only if the committee of that group has established that pattern. The right hon. Gentleman has just given an inaccurate portrayal of what PCGs will do.

We have frequently asked the right hon. Gentleman to guarantee that the choices and services that are now available to patients of fundholders will be available when PCGs are up and running. They are now up and running, and he has still not been able to guarantee that such choices, services and flexibility will be available. Why not? Because quite patently in some parts of the country—the evidence is flowing in—they are no longer available. There is less for NHS patients.

There will be fewer treatments and drugs available to NHS patients when NICE does its nasty, ugly work. There will be less available to patients when pricing policy

drives some drugs from the market and when GPs find for the first time that their budgets are cash limited. That is what the Bill provides.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about removing bureaucracy. It will cost £150 million to set up the PCG bureaucracy. He talks about cost-effectiveness. I hope that NHS Direct works, but studies currently show that the average NHS Direct call costs £20 whereas a call from a GP surgery costs £3, so there is not even a saving that can be passed on for the benefit of the NHS patient.

This ineffective, defective Bill does not deal with the real problems of the NHS. It does nothing to address the single biggest problem that has eaten away at the NHS from its inception—it was recognised by Nye Bevan himself, but is denied by the Government. The NHS cannot and never has been able to do it all. On top of increased resources from Government—which will always be provided under successive Governments—I want to find fresh ways of putting extra resources, facilities and expertise at the disposal of the NHS for the benefit of patients.

The Secretary of State has sat there and laughed at those patients. He has denied that the dispossessed are dispossessed. He pretends to be spending money that he is not spending, and to be creating extra doctors who are not being created. In the end, he will have to face a reckoning, because the true test of people's satisfaction with the NHS is not Government rhetoric, but patients' own experience. A quarter of a million more patients who are waiting to see a consultant have their own experience. Patients of former fundholders who are now unable to get the same services have their own experience. Patients coming off the lists because they are so desperate that they go private even if they do not want to have their own experience.

Those people know that the Government are not delivering on the NHS. The Secretary of State should come to the Dispatch Box and apologise for what must have been the most insulting performance that the House has witnessed in some years.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind hon. Members that all Back-Bench speeches will be limited to 10 minutes.

5.49 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I hope to stick to that time limit, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First, however, let me correct what the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) said about the PFI and our attitude when we were in opposition. The Conservative Government made a complete hash of the PFI—

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): We did not.

Mr. Barron: Will the hon. Gentleman keep quiet for a few minutes? The Conservative Government did nothing at all. They did not set up a single hospital under the PFI. They introduced a Bill—

Mr. Fabricant: You voted against it.

Mr. Barron: Will the hon. Gentleman keep quiet? You introduced a Bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must use the correct parliamentary language. I suggest that the House should settle down.

Mr. Barron: The last Government introduced a Bill called, if memory serves me correctly, the National Health Service (Residual Liabilities) Bill. The Secretary of State and the Minister who were in charge of that Bill are present now. It was in Committee for two or three weeks at the most. We co-operated fully with the Government, and the Bill completed its stages in the House, but when those in the private sector had another look at it, they said, "It is not good enough: you will have to come back with something else."

About three weeks before the general election campaign, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) offered another Bill to the then shadow health team in the hope that they would endorse it promptly and allow its speedy passage, because the Conservatives could not get anything started with the PFI. In the end, he did not give us that Bill, although we would have gladly taken the matter off his hands, because he did not dare to go public about the mess that the Conservatives had made in regard to the PFI. The present Government have embarked on the biggest programme of building major NHS hospitals for years, because the last Government did not know how to handle the private sector in terms of the PFI.

The Bill makes major changes. I do not know how many Bills providing for structural change in the NHS we have debated when I have been in the Chamber, but there must have been many since my arrival in the House in 1983. It is a great pity that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald does not understand some of the changes in this Bill; I hope to tell her at some stage what I think is likely to happen.

In fact, I think that the NHS will experience a cultural change. That will not happen overnight—it will take many years—but I believe that aspects of it will challenge parts of the service, although if the service does not change it will not be capable of doing in the next century what it has done in the second half of this one. If it is to retain the admiration and support of its patients and the taxpayer, it must recognise the need for it to change to meet both the expectations of patients and advances in medical science.

Through the media, patients are becoming increasingly aware of new advances on both a national and an international scale. As they become more knowledgeable, they will expect the best treatments that are available. They will want to know more about the latest drug on the market, and how it could affect them. Professionals in the NHS will have to meet those new demands, and the Bill rightly aims to create a more patient-led service.

For the first time, a Government are introducing a statutory duty to implement a "quality of care". It beggars belief that any Member should make it clear from the Dispatch Box that he or she does not recognise the fundamental change that such a duty will make to health care. No one who does not recognise that can have read the Bill properly.

Making quality a driving force for decision making at all levels of the service should guarantee clinical excellence for all patients. I oppose rationing in the NHS, and I hope that every other hon. Member does as well. The Bill will enable us to get rid of it, by ensuring clinical

[Mr. Barron]

excellence for all patients. The establishment of the Commission for Health Improvement is another step forward, although it was dismissed by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald, who seems to oppose the idea of clinical improvement in the NHS. That is ridiculous.

Independent assessment of local work to improve quality should have been introduced years ago, and the use of a wide range of expertise and experience to investigate problems is also overdue. It should be welcomed by all who work in the NHS. It is clear—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave a couple of examples—that past performance has been variable. People have been slow to detect and act on lapses in quality, and that is not acceptable.

The introduction of evidence-based national service frameworks should ensure consistent access to services and quality care throughout the country by setting national standards, and defining patterns and levels of care in relation to specific diseases or parts of the service. My right hon. Friend said that coronary heart disease and mental illness would be among the first conditions to be dealt with by the frameworks, which will be based on the Calman Hine model for the provision of cancer care. The recommendations of what was then the Calman committee were published in 1995. The final recommendation states:

"The data suggest that the impact of specialised care for common cancers, and probably for many cancers, can increase long term survival by 5-10 per cent., a very important clinical outcome."

People reading that report might have thought that the NHS could continue to offer all services in all district general hospitals, as it has for years, but the report made it clear that that should end. I am pleased to say that it has in regard to cancer, but it should end in other contexts as well. We should ensure that our clinicians do the best that they can for every patient, regardless of where the service is being delivered. If Opposition Front Benchers are really concerned about what is happening, or should be happening, in our health service, they will comment on that.

The Bill will provide a new system of clinical governance to ensure that there is continued improvement in NHS trusts and primary care bodies. That is what I look for, as a patient, and what other NHS patients want. We are not interested in arguments about structures.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence will be clinician-led. It will give a strong lead, in terms of both clinical services and cost-effectiveness. It will issue new guidelines for the NHS, putting an end to all the mixed messages that people receive about new drugs. How many hon. Members have sat in a doctor's waiting room behind a salesman who wants to sell another message about how his drug is better than those that the doctor already has?

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) looks confused. Let me tell him that I have sat in my doctor's surgery, and have seen salesmen waiting to sell their drugs. It is about time that there was a better way of conveying information to doctors.

We should be concerned about new drugs and treatments. Those in the NHS should understand the clinical effectiveness of drugs better, so that the decisions that are made are the best for patients. A recognition of cost-effectiveness will not necessarily mean the cheapest treatment: in certain circumstances, it could mean that NICE will recommend the most expensive treatment if that is best for the patient. We should welcome that, however, as should the pharmaceutical industry.

It is clear that some drugs benefit only a small minority of people who suffer from a particular condition. The challenge is to identify those who are assisted by the intervention. Expecting the NHS to pay for expensive products that do not work will just bring the pharmaceutical industry, and the NHS, into disrepute. I think that the industry realises that it must sort that out, although I realise that it will not be an easy task. We all know that beta interferon is likely to help approximately 10 per cent. of multiple sclerosis sufferers, but it is more difficult to identify that 10 per cent. That is the real challenge for the pharmaceutical industry and the NHS—and, indeed, for NICE—and it is a challenge that we should support.

I must say to the right hon. Lady—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

6 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): The Secretary of State for Health attracted to the Chamber three Conservative Members who are former Secretaries of State for Health. We should all have come here out of sympathy with the Secretary of State because his task is very hard, if it is done properly: to prioritise the service and to produce steady development within finite means when demands are ever burgeoning. I regret to say that we were all drawn here by the fact that, in tackling his task, the Secretary of State is getting into a bigger and bigger mess. We all fear that, in relation to how the health service will perform, he is building up for himself considerable problems in the medium term. Our constituents will all feel that winter by winter, as the crises start to reoccur in the system.

In 10 minutes, I have no time to answer all the points in the Secretary of State's speech, but I do not wish to do so; he sacrificed any sympathy that he might have had from me. He has a standard Opposition-based rant on what the health service was like when he took over. On every occasion he gives an extremely clever, partial and disingenuous presentation of the money that he says that he has, and what he is doing. On each occasion he produces an announcement—today, it was on NHS Direct—to distract the journalists from what the Government are doing. He made only partial references to the Bill.

The reason why the Secretary of State is getting into a mess is that, as he will discover, however skilful the rhetoric, however good the special advisers and press presentation, he may fool people for a bit, but it is what he does to the health service that will come back to live with him. He will find that the Bill will do considerable harm.

I anticipate my criticisms by stating what I welcome about the Bill. It does not reverse the reforms of the previous Government. It does not repeal the internal market or anything like it, although that is not a phrase that I would ever use to describe it. I am glad that the purchaser-provider divide is kept completely intact. No doubt it is regarded as clever that contracts are now described as "collaborative understandings", but they are

still there between purchasers and providers. The Secretary of State is even extending the number of NHS trusts on the provider side.

The Bill alters what we used to call in the jargon—it is only jargon—the purchasing side: the commissioning of health care on behalf of the patient. The Secretary of State is moving away from fundholding into new primary care groups, which, as I hope to show, are a wholly undesirable change in the system and will, in the long run, have only adverse effects.

I say in passing—I have no time to say more—that I welcome the fact that elements of quality control are built into the Bill. We began that when we introduced clinical audit into our reforms. When we were in office, we spent our whole time trying to build a more patient-oriented service, and better management of clinical practice and quality, with the support of the best people in the profession.

An attempt is being made to produce further improvement in performance management, although it is being done in an odd way. We have new acronyms and we have new quangos in the acronym-ridden national health service—CHIMP will now join NICE. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) is right to say that we are not sure what NICE and CHIMP will wind up doing, but they at least are commendable.

Overall, my judgment of the Bill is that it is centralising in its ambitions, which is a serious mistake in such a giant service: the biggest employer and the biggest public service in western Europe. In its changes to the purchaser-provider divide, the Bill is bureaucratic in the extreme. As the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) said, that will lead to cultural change on the ground. That change will be a stifling of individual initiative by the best go-ahead general practitioners, because that practice will be made more difficult because those GPs will be locked into a group with people who will not want to be as innovative as them.

The best general practitioners will have to proceed at the pace of the slowest as they try to develop the primary care system. The decision-making provisions in the Bill go back to the worst of the old NHS. Slow, expensive decision making will be conducted by the large committees that are being re-established. I fear that they will not function well.

Primary care must continue to develop. Every Minister with responsibility for health knows that developing primary services continues to be one of the major priorities in trying to solve the conundrum of how to meet rising demand out of finite resources. However, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald, I fear that primary care will go through a process of levelling down, rather than levelling up, for quite a period once the primary care groups come in.

I concentrate on the new primary care groups and the end of fundholding; there are other important parts of the Bill about which I have not time to talk. I will not express an opinion on the parts of the Bill that concern the PPRS—the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme—and drug cost provisions. If I did so, I would have to declare an outside interest as chairman of a pharmaceutical wholesale company. I make only one comment, which is faintly relevant. One detailed aspect of the primary care groups has been sadly neglected: the role of the pharmacists as a profession. The fact that they will have no real involvement in the new groups is not to the advantage of patients.

Primary care groups are based on the abolition of general practice fundholding. Fundholding was a success. One of the key things that the Secretary of State tried to deny was that we worked to ensure—the best reforms do it—that those who carried out the reforms had ownership of the reforms themselves. The fundholders were volunteers and they were largely enthusiasts.

Almost 60 per cent. of GPs wished to become fundholders. If we had achieved 100 per cent. GP fundholding, as we did with NHS trusts, the Government would never have dared to reverse the policy. They are going to great and unnecessary lengths to reverse it now. It put family doctors in the driving seat in raising the standard of care in their locality. It gave them new and unprecedented influence over the quality of and access to hospital-based services. It enabled them to concentrate on the needs of their own patients. The benefits from the growing number of fundholders were spreading to the rest of the service.

In the short time I have left, I mention specifically what I think are the dangers of the new primary care groups. First, they will level the service down. I will not repeat what my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald has said. The best fundholders developed set-ups in their practices that were unprecedented in the NHS: physiotherapy in the practice, consultants coming in for special in-house sessions to deal with people in the surgery, better facilities than ever before for minor surgery by GPs. In many cases, after the Bill, those things will be squeezed out in some practices by constraints on the budget of the primary care group as a whole.

A second thing will be lost. Compared with the old fundholders, GPs in the new groups will lack the clout and influence over colleagues in hospital-based and community-based NHS services; those fundholders were such a beneficial influence on behalf of patients.

Practitioners' incentive to achieve efficient practice will be lost in a particular practice because money will be distributed according to historic spending patterns—to practices as a whole. Indeed, the way in which the money is being distributed to the groups rewards the more inefficient practitioners. They will get their historic level of spending, and some more efficient practitioners will be penalised. Under the system, every practitioner will be handicapped by the most difficult GPs in the slowest practices.

The biggest problem in some primary care groups will be that some GPs will simply not be interested in being involved in such management and development of the service. Keen GPs will probably get themselves elected on to the boards, but they will have no way in which to stop the less keen from inhibiting what they can do. That is a serious problem. The cash-limited budgets that will be imposed on those large, almost unmanageable blocks of GP practices will give rise to particular difficulties, especially as prescribing costs will be imposed on the groups, which will have no ability to hold to account those whose prescribing habits start to exceed the budget.

My biggest sadness is that GPs will lose that commitment to their own patients and practice and the incentive to drive improvements, which led to benefits on the ground.

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

I agree with a local GP, Dr. Simon Fradd, who is deputy chairman of the British Medical Association's GP practitioner committee. He says that the policy is equivalent to rationing and will lead to the refusal of service. I also agree with Professor Maynard, the professor of health service management at York university, who says the same: GPs will be put in a position where they will have to ration care. I hope that I am wrong.

I take part in health debates because I want the national health service to survive and succeed. However, the Government's party political rhetoric, the partial presentation of the facts, and Bills such as this one will make things worse.

6.10 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I should like very warmly to welcome the main thrust of the Health Bill, particularly its three key provisions on quality of provision, emphasising the role of primary care, and especially the long-overdue abolition of the internal market.

When the history of this phase of the national health service is written, the Bill will be remembered as the end of the privatisation by stealth attempted by the Tories over the past 25 years. I say 25 years because I was working in social services 25 years ago, when Sir Keith Joseph was the Secretary of State and introduced the changes removing the democratic element in health provision from local government to health authorities. His view was that the market had an important role in health provision. Gradually, over the past 25 years, when the Tories were in power, they moved increasingly in the direction of allowing the market to run health care. Current Tory Front Benchers have made it quite clear that they are firmly wedded to the market in health—which is profoundly opposed by most civilised people in the United Kingdom, whatever their politics.

When the Thatcher Government were elected in 1979, they realised that the British people would not vote for privatisation of the health service—because a vast, cross-party majority of the British electorate support the central tenets of the national health service, as they have done since the service was started in the 1940s. The Tories therefore began the process of privatisation by stealth, with a range of measures that I should like to mention briefly.

The first measure to be introduced, in the early 1980s, was general management. Management concepts were wheeled into the national health service that were totally alien to it. More importantly, people from business were wheeled in, although they had absolutely no knowledge of the NHS. A biscuit manager was brought in as the general manager of my health authority, and the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) may well recall the consequent problems that we had in Wakefield.

The previous Government created a culture of paying for care. Year after year, prescription charges were hiked way above inflation. The Health and Medicines Act 1988 introduced charges for eyesight and dental checks and for preventive health checks. For older people, there were also tax concessions on private medicine, as the previous Government believed that such an incentive should be introduced to encourage ever more people into the private sector. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) nods. He is in favour of people using the private sector.

The previous Government also instituted the wholesale privatisation of community care. I have received computations from the Library showing that, in the 10 years before introduction of the 1993 community care changes, £10 billion of social security resources were pumped into the private residential and nursing home sector. At the same time as there was a huge expansion in construction of private nursing and care homes, there was a deliberate run down of NHS provision for older people.

The Bill will reverse that privatisation process. I therefore believe that, in many respects, the Bill's passage will be a major landmark in making the NHS once again conform to Bevan's vision for it.

The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 introduced the internal market. During its passage, several Conservative Members made it clear that they believed that the internal market was only a prelude to moving further towards a market system, in which the vast majority of patients would be expected to have private insurance, with only a state safety net for those without it, as in the United States.

The end result—regardless of what the Tories' reasoned amendment to this Bill states about fundholding—was a two-tier system. In my constituency, I had people who were life-long Tory voters but who objected fundamentally to the fundholding system, which provided them with second-class treatment. The names and addresses of those who came to see me about the way in which the fundholding system operated and impacted on their specific treatment needs are on record.

I praise the Tories for knowing what they believe in and pursuing those beliefs. Although they were absolutely hammered on the NHS at the general election, they still believe in moving us ever closer towards private health care. In every one of her speeches and interviews, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) has said, "Make more use of the private sector." A couple of weeks ago, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton made a major speech—in which I was given the great honour of a mention or two—the central thrust of which was that, "We can't afford to pay for a national health service. Get people into the private sector."

When talking about moving NHS patients into the private sector, Tory Members fail to deal with one specific difficulty: the private sector is staffed entirely by those who were trained in the NHS. Therefore, the more the private sector develops, the more that the NHS will be denuded of staff. They fail also to appreciate—as the Health Committee is discovering in its inquiries—that the quality of care in the private sector sometimes leaves much to be desired.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald has left the Chamber. She mentioned three categories of the dispossessed, but failed to mention a fourth one—NHS patients who wait patiently on a NHS waiting list, until someone from the private sector queue

jumps, putting everyone back a place. Those people do not have access to the treatment that they need because of queue jumping by people from the private sector.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Where does that happen?

Mr. Hinchliffe: There is plenty of evidence of it. The hon. Gentleman need not worry, as I could give him plenty of examples.

In the few minutes that I have left to speak, I should like to concentrate on a few key matters. As I said, I welcome the Bill's concentration on the quality of provision. In my own constituency, I have been concerned that, in a minority of cases, patients have had a very raw deal from the health service and not received answers to some of their medical problems.

As I also said, I welcome the Bill's emphasis on primary care. However, I should like to mention one specific concern. I believe that the Bill's vision of involving the social services should go much further, and follow the model provided by Northern Ireland, where there are one-stop shops in general practitioners' surgeries. Northern Ireland's health centres genuinely offer access to child protection, home care, district nurses and various professionals other than GPs. I worked, 25 years ago, as a GP-attached social worker. Gradually, we are returning to that system, which worked so well but was damaged by the reforms introduced in 1974 by the Conservatives.

I hope that one specific aspect of the Bill—on governance of the NHS—will be dealt with in Committee. I have previously raised concerns about the democratic deficit in the health service, and believe that one reason why some patients sometimes misuse the NHS—by not turning up for appointments, for example—is that they lack a feeling of personal ownership of the service. Within the primary care groups, trusts and the overall service, we shall have to consider how to involve patients in the service, as they currently are not.

I have also previously expressed my disappointment at the continuation of the system of appointment of officials which was so discredited under the previous Government. Although those who currently hold appointments usually believe in the health service, we still have to ensure that local people who use the service are involved in decisions on the service's direction.

A key difference between the Government and the Opposition is demonstrated by the Bill's replacement of the duty to compete with the duty of co-operation. It is a fundamental difference between the two sides. I think that the vast majority of people in the United Kingdom—Tories included—believe that the NHS is about co-operation, collaboration and working together. I wish the Bill well in its passage through the House.

6.19 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Almost two years ago today—when we were about 14 days out from the general election—the Labour leader and Labour spokespeople said that there were only 14 days left for the country to decide whether it wanted to save the national health service. Many of us thought then that we could be well disposed towards Labour's commitment to the NHS. We would rather have done what was necessary ourselves, but if we could not be in power, at least Labour would be bold and resolute, and would make flagship proposals to transform our struggling national health service for the better.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): Correct.

Mr. Hughes: If the Bill is supposed to be the great, bold, dramatic flagship that the hon. Gentleman implies, he should be sorely disappointed. It is a timid little measure. Although some things in it are timely and welcome—as my colleagues in the other place have said, we support those—there is much more that the Government should and could do. Sadly, none of that is in the Bill.

The Government started off on the wrong tack by saying that their first priority, before any legislation, would be the reduction of waiting lists. There is nothing about that in the Bill, perhaps because the target was wrong anyway. Even if it had been the right target, the bold promise of a 100,000 reduction is still some way off. The figure is down by 50,000 in England, so one in 23 people fewer are waiting; really successful! One in 14 people fewer are waiting in Scotland, and in Wales more people are waiting than when Labour came to office. So far, therefore, there has hardly been a dramatic change.

The Secretary of State said that the Government inherited a health service in deficit, but if we look round the country we see plenty of health authorities that have started the new financial year this month in deficit.

The Secretary of State also said that Labour had inherited a health service in which there were many parts of the country where one could not find a dentist. I was in Cornwall the other day with my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed), and my colleagues there have just launched a campaign to try to get a decent number of dentists almost anywhere in the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) keeps trying to make it clear to the Government that although everybody identified the lack of dentists as a major issue, there has hardly been any significant change in numbers.

There was nothing in the Labour manifesto about the need for more staff in the health service. There was no commitment to employing more nurses or doctors, although everyone else knew that there was a major crisis. We looked for dramatic responses.

By contrast, some of the things that have happened were not mentioned in the Labour manifesto. NHS Direct must have been dreamed up after 1 May 1997.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): They inherited it.

Mr. Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman, a former Secretary of State for Health, says that the Government inherited the proposal. It certainly was not in the Labour manifesto.

Mr. Dorrell: It was in ours.

Mr. Hughes: Indeed it was, as the right hon. Gentleman fairly says. The 20 walk-in surgeries were not in the Labour manifesto, either.

[Mr. Hughes]

Labour's great commitment was that the two-tier health service would go, and that there would be an end to the internal market. In one sense the two-tier service will go, in that the Bill will end the division between fundholding and non-fundholding. We welcome that. However, a greater concern for most people is the patchwork nature of the health service. People who live in one place have access to treatment that people who live elsewhere cannot get.

That problem has not disappeared, and nothing in the Bill will make it disappear. For someone waiting for beta interferon or in vitro fertilisation, that is the issue that matters. It is no good having a national health service theoretically available to all, if it is not available to all in the place where one lives. That is a multi-tier health service.

The Prime Minister said that the internal market would end, but as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), another former Secretary of State for Health, rightly said, that has not happened. The internal market is still here; there are still purchasers and providers. Indeed, there will be more people in that equation. Of course, some of the arrangements will be different, but the internal market will not have gone away.

When the Prime Minister was speaking in the debate on the Queen's Speech, I tackled him about rationing. He said that Labour had proposed the best framework in which to determine priorities. Now, however, although everybody else in the country says that the big issue is how we decide what the NHS should do, how we should pay for it, and why all treatment is not available everywhere, and asks, "Isn't that rationing?" the Government say, "There is no rationing; that is a delusion."

None the less, the Government have made a proposal to deal with the problem that they say does not exist. It is not, of course, to be dealt with by involving the public, because that would be far too dangerous; the public might want to express a view.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) spoke in response to the Queen's Speech, he set out the view that we hold today, as we did then—the same view as we have formed about the Bill throughout its progress both through the other place and here.

For example, all the professionals in England could have been involved in the process, but only some of them have been invited to the table. In Wales, a wider invitation has been sent out for people to take part in the new Labour NHS.

The Government could also have been bold and followed the logic of all the recommendations from the Select Committee on Health, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and includes my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand), about merging health and social services. The logic of that proposal cries out to be heard.

However, there is only one little proposal about health and social services consulting a bit more. They must still keep two separate managements running two separate regimes, offering services that often overlap, although they are charged for differently. There is no proposal to change that, although I can tell Labour Members that, logically, this change will be made. As with much that the Labour party does, the Government will come to the conclusion much later than others who have thought about the subject. For instance, the Select Committee, like the Liberal Democrats, has realised for some time what the right policy is.

There is nothing in the Bill about one of the issues that we have spent much of the last two years talking about: how do we recruit the people to provide a quality health service? We can produce the most wonderful statements about quality, but if we do not have the staff we will not get the quality either.

There could have been extra incentives to recruit people and encourage them to be trainees, or to be undergraduates in nursing, physiotherapy or medicine—but there is nothing in the Bill about that. There is nothing about recruitment and retention, nothing about rationing and nothing about resources.

It might be said that resources are dealt with elsewhere in the parliamentary timetable. That is true, but there could have been something in the Bill that tried to answer the big question about the health service: how do we link the resources with the services that the NHS should provide? Of that there is not a word.

The Conservative contribution, made by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who is not now in the Chamber, was interesting. As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight said at the time, sotto voce, there was something of the Barbara Woodhouse of the House of Commons about the right hon. Lady when she instructed everyone to sit down and be quiet as she set out her prescription for the NHS.

As I understand it, there are six Tory criticisms of the Bill. The first is that it removes the choice for doctor and patient to send the patient where they think he or she should go. There is some truth in that criticism, and although the amendment made in the House of Lords was a welcome move in the right direction, it was left pretty unclear what the Government think should happen. We shall press them further on that subject.

The Tories also criticise the end of fundholding. We do not. We think that there should be only one type of doctor's practice, so that people who go to a surgery should not get better or worse treatment, depending on what sort of doctor is there. Such a regime was the legacy of the period when the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe was Secretary of State.

The Tories say that there is unnecessary and expensive bureaucracy. That is a bit rich, coming from them. They set up the most bureaucratic health service that we have ever had, so their criticism is not easy to support. They also say, "We cannot have any more upheaval." That, too, is a bit rich. Apparently Tory upheaval is fine, but if it is anyone else's upheaval, that is not so good. I lived through the Tory health service reforms, such as the creation of the internal market—and the poll tax too—so I am not sure that people will believe what the Tories say about upheaval.

There was another argument about the competitiveness of the pharmaceutical industry being undermined. There is a danger of that happening, and we are alive to it; I shall say more later. The Tories also say that the powers of the Secretary of State are being centralised. That is true. One of the great themes of the Bill is providing more

power for the Secretary of State and less power for the patient, less power for the people. That is a fundamental flaw.

Over the past two years many of the things that could have been done either have not been done or have been done too late. Spending plans were on hold for nearly 24 months. Staff pay was staged in year one, and many employees have not caught up in year two. The staffing crisis was not addressed for 20 months. As often happens, the Government have been slow to get up and move.

Then the Government are desperate to be seen to be doing things, even if they have not quite thought through how their actions relate to their other policies. We heard a good example of that today in the statement by the Prime Minister. Only recently have the Government realised that the total waiting time between someone realising that they need treatment and getting it matters. That means not just in-patient waiting time—the time that someone waits to obtain treatment—but the time that they wait to see a consultant in the first place.

The Government have only just realised that we have a terrible staffing crisis in the health service. I am not sure that they will be able to act in time to do something about it. Ideas such as walk-in high street surgeries and NHS Direct are fine as far as they go, but no one has thought through how they integrate with the local health service and work with the other structures, such as primary care trusts and groups, that are being set up; or how to ensure that the new services do not result in doctors, who are in short supply, being attracted away from areas where they are needed and cannot be replaced.

We are in favour of innovation. We are in favour of nurses sharing the leadership of local community health groups with doctors. We are in favour of collaboration among professionals—all of them. We are in favour of co-operatives of doctors doing out-of-hours services. We are in favour of telephone advice in the right place, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) said earlier, we must recognise that it has limited value. We are in favour of more self-medication, including alternative therapies. We are in favour of pharmacies having a proper recognised role. We are in favour of the whole range of NHS services, but there should be democratic accountability.

The Government have missed a great opportunity to bring local health services and local social services together under democratically accountable elected bodies. That would enable the public to participate in decisions, rather than excluding them. The great hidden danger, to which the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe referred, is that those services will be cash-limited and the public will not be able to do anything about it. It is no good giving a lot of money in theory to the health service to be dished out around the country if social services are being stretched and capped and cannot do the job that is expected of them.

There is not a word in the Bill about regional health services. They exist. There are regional health authorities, but nobody elects them or has any say on strategic planning; they are just appointed. The Bill also fails to provide any greater democratic control at national level in the four countries of the UK, which is where the health service will be controlled after May. Recent figures show a worrying trend for the two years the Government have been in office. The number of recognised Labour party people appointed to non-executive posts in health trusts in England has gone up from 8 to 226—an increase from 0.3 per cent. to 9.6 per cent. Needless to say, the other parties are considerably behind.

There are many amendments that we would like the Government to accept, but we fear that they will not. We would like to remove the difficulty of cash-limiting from primary care groups and trusts and make them accountable, but we fear that the Government will not do that. We would like a better balance of the professions in the primary care trusts so that the chair and the majority—or largest minority—of places are not always reserved for doctors if they want them. That is the deal that the Government made to get the proposals past the doctors. We would like to know why the requirements for quality of care do not apply to health authorities and primary care groups as well as to trusts. We want a commission that looks at the quality of care—we have argued for that for years—but it should be truly independent and authoritative and there should be a link between the commission's recommendations and the ability to deliver. It is no good the commission going round the country specifying action that should be taken if the Secretary of State says that the Government do not have the resources to deliver the improvements. The best model would be the prison inspectorate, which is increasingly respected as an independent voice that says what is wrong in the prison service.

We have argued the case for local and health authority mergers. The Government are still fudging the issue on the control of prices for the drugs industry. They are saying that they like the voluntary system, but if it does not work they will introduce a statutory system. The pharmaceutical industry needs to be encouraged because it is a great British industry, but the NHS has an interest in regulating the way in which it is charged for the services that it has to buy from the industry.

On the professions, the Secretary of State has clearly learned a lesson from the debates on the Bill in the other place. Initially he sought all the powers for himself, but there have now been many welcome amendments. All the professions should be regulated. It is a long time since some of them first asked for regulation. For example, psychologists want people to know who a proper psychologist is. We need a system that can bring them quickly into the regulated fold, but we should not change from a system of professional self-regulation without primary legislation. The framework must be clear so that each profession knows where it stands.

A crucial amendment was forced on the Government in the other place to bring the independent health care sector within the remit of the quality control initiatives. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) was wrong to say that it should be under the control of the NHS. It should be under the control of the Government. We firmly believe that the private health care sector should be regulated according to the same standards as apply to the public health care sector. We shall resist any attempt by the Government to reverse that welcome change to the Bill. We shall also support the other two major amendments made against the Government, which were to ensure that a majority of a primary care group voted in favour before it became a trust and to ensure the right to refer out of area, which is another name for the existing practice of extra-contractual referrals.

[Mr. Hughes]

There is just one further issue that the Government still resist and I have not heard an explanation from the Secretary of State of why they are being so difficult. There should be clear equal opportunities requirements throughout the NHS, not just on the basis of gender and race, but also on the basis of age. It would be entirely proper to put such a provision in the Bill and we hope that the Government will change their mind.

The Bill proposes changes to create a better quality and more accountable health service. We welcome that, but the Government could have come up with provisions to answer the big questions and meet the needs of the people. Sadly, this short Bill for England, Wales and Scotland is a Bill of missed opportunities in every case. We do not understand why we are legislating for Scotland in April and May of 1999 when from May the Scottish Parliament, which properly wants to run the health service, will take over those powers. We also do not understand why the Government are seeking to impose a system on Wales when the Welsh Assembly is to be elected next month. It, too, will be given responsibility for the health service. The Government want to give the Secretary of State more responsibility for the health service in England when there are plenty of people at local and regional level who are competent to make decisions to meet local needs. We understand that, but we strongly oppose it.

The Government could have introduced a more democratic local health service. They could have introduced a strategic democratic tier for the health service. They could have provided incentives for more people to work for the health service. Above all, they could have owned up to the fact that decisions about resources and rationing have to be made.

We were constructive in seeking to amend the Bill in the Lords, but we remain unhappy because it is weak and timid. We cannot support the Government tonight, but we shall work in Committee to improve the Bill and make it more worthy of the Government's ambitions and objectives and of what the people expect from the health service. By the time it comes back to the House, we hope that the Bill will be bolder and braver than the current very timid measure.

6.40 pm

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): Since the general election, nothing has given me greater pleasure—in the Chamber, at least—than I have now in supporting the Bill. I have been able to view the national health service for some years from a variety of vantage points: as a member of a family health services authority; as a health authority member; as a chair of social services; and as a member of a community health council. In all that time, I never perceived the benefits of the elixir described by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke).

Primary care groups may have a great deal to learn, but they are infinitely preferable to their GP fundholder predecessors. Unlike GP fundholding, they are inclusive, not exclusive; integrated, not fragmented; co-operative, not competitive. They have the capacity to take communities along with them, on board rather than in tow.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe mentioned various senior clinicians of his acquaintance. I refer to only one such person of my acquaintance, Dr. Kingsley Reid, an eminent GP in my constituency and chair of the Leeds local medical committee of GPs. He said that the previous Government made such a mess of the NHS that he doubts the capacity of any Government to repair it.

Senior GPs have welcomed PCGs as an opportunity to put primary care in the front line and in the NHS driving seat. They do not regard everything to do with PCGs as sweetness and light, and there are still concerns about the work load expected of PCG board members and the speed with which the groups may be forced to develop. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will take those concerns into account.

There are further concerns relating to learning the lessons of GP fundholding. PCGs should not be allowed to advance to the detriment of their neighbours. Whatever defence the Conservative party may have mounted for fundholding, it is a fact that it was promoted on the basis of fear, bribery and, in some cases, turning a blind eye to issues of probity.

Many GPs opposed fundholding but still became fundholders, not because they were hypocrites but because they knew that the Conservative party would do everything that it could to make its ideological baby walk. Someone was clearly going to get a bum deal, and GPs did not want them or their patients to be left holding the nappy.

Those GPs were proved right when the Conservative Government stuffed fundholders' surgeries, if not their mouths, with gold. Allocations of cash to fundholders were based on historic referral and prescribing patterns. It was possible to engage in a frenzy of prescribing and referring in the preparatory year before fundholding, knowing that such activity would form the baseline of the fundholding budget.

Fundholders also received generous extra funding for staff and computers. It may be said that there was a choice, but there was also a great deal of incentive, which came from a levelling down process. Those who were not fundholders' patients suffered the levelling down produced by the system introduced by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe.

Fundholders were in a privileged win-win position in respect of surpluses and deficits. They were able to keep their savings and leave to the health authority the task of bailing them out when they overspent. *[Interruption.]* One would not even run a whist drive in Maidstone, or wherever the right hon. Lady's constituency is, let alone a national health service, in that way. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) has already made a speech. She cannot now make another one.

Mr. Truswell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for interrupting our conversation.

When Leeds health authority was seriously in deficit and some of its contracts for routine procedures were running out, the majority of fundholders were sitting on surpluses, many well into six figures. One such surplus was almost £300,000. By the fourth year of fundholding in Leeds, the total surplus amounted to £2.7 million, which roughly equated to the deficit faced by the

health authority, which was responsible for purchasing care for those who were not in the privileged position of being patients of fundholders.

Levelling down also took place among fundholders. Having foisted a great deal of riches on the early tranches of fundholding, the Conservative Government discovered a simple arithmetical truth: one cannot continue to give an increasing proportion of people an unfair share of the cake. The early tranches were reduced as new fundholders came in, but those who were not fundholders were still left in the sink.

The fact that fundholding quickly passed its sell-by date was illustrated by the way in which so many different systems grew up. There were total purchasing projects, locality commissioning and multi-funds. Those systems were more in keeping with PCGs than with fundholding.

Another attraction of fundholding was the fact that accountability was relaxed to the point at which it was very flaccid indeed. The definition of what constituted improvements in patient care was stretched to the limit. Several times, our auditors on the FHSA raised serious questions about clinical items such as the purchase of lavish oak furniture and extravagant computer upgrades, especially as the suppliers were linked commercially with the practices concerned. The CHC also raised questions about money being used to resurface car parks. Perhaps, in due course, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence could consider the clinical effectiveness of tarmac, oak and other such items.

We went off to the Kremlin, which is the affectionate title by which the NHS headquarters in Leeds is known, and were told, "Hands off. Go away. We're not interested. Don't you be doing anything to discourage fundholders, now or in the future." That was the Conservative party's approach.

The Conservatives display a slavish adherence to GP fundholding, but they should answer a few questions in defence of that wonderful system. Why, if it was so good, did it perversely have to rely on its shortcomings to attract recruits? Why did GPs have to be bribed with cash, staff and computers, at the expense of other patients and non-fundholders? Why was such a blind eye turned to issues of probity? *[Interruption.]* The answer can be given in the summing up, so please let us not hear it from the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) now.

The only tiers that should be shed in the context of GP fundholding are the two tiers of NHS care to which it gave rise. I can give no better example than the experience of my constituent Kristie Swift. She was suffering from a common ear complaint that required routine surgery. Her hearing was badly affected and her whole educational development was being undermined.

Mr. Hammond: Sounds like Jennifer's ear.

Mr. Truswell: A consultant said that he could not treat Kristie that financial year because her GP was not a fundholder, and her head teacher asked me to look into the case because she was so worried about her lack of development.

It turned out that Kristie's GP was in fact a fundholder, and she received her operation long before the end of the financial year, so within a matter of a few weeks, she had been on both levels of the two-tier system produced by the Conservative party, and for good measure she had been the victim of the convoluted bureaucracy spawned by that dynamic duo of the internal market and GP fundholding.

I heard some mutterings about Jennifer's ear. To some extent, that may be pertinent, although this case is 100 per cent. true, not a dramatisation based on what we know in any case to have been a reality. The issue of Jennifer's ear in 1992 concerned the difference as regards access between the NHS and the private sector.

I have described the battle of Kristie's ear. We are not talking today about the division between public and private, but about an NHS that the Conservative party divided against itself. The Bill will help to close that divide and is a welcome stitch in time for our NHS.

6.50 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): The NHS is probably the most popular institution in Britain, but judging by the Secretary of State's opening remarks he obviously does not believe that the Bill will be popular. He spent most of his time talking about other health service issues rather than the Bill. Because the NHS is popular, it generates huge concern among those who use it and those who think they would like to use it. It is also one of the few institutions over which the Government have total control.

Members on both sides of the House are committed to the national health service. Despite what the Labour party says, we are committed to making the NHS efficient and effective—but will the Bill contribute to that aim? It is suggested that the Bill will save money through the abolition of fundholding and that it will release scarce resources to be used for patient care. However, primary care groups will probably cost some £150 million a year to administer. Some estimates have put that figure as high as £300 million a year, excluding start-up costs for the new procedure. Ministers have suggested that that money will be recycled, but that is a nonsense. The administration of fundholding costs only £135 million a year, and that is the figure given by the Minister of State to the Select Committee on Health earlier this year. The Secretary of State said earlier that that £135 million has already been used, or recycled, for cancer screening.

The Bill will not abolish the so-called internal market, because there will still be a purchaser-provider balance. The relationship remains intact, although I am sure that Ministers will point to clause 23, which deals with co-operation. It is a motherhood and apple pie clause, which suggests that we will all work together in some great co-operative effort to deliver our objectives. Primary care trusts and health authorities will still buy in services from trusts and local authorities. Level 4 primary care trusts will be able to provide some services for themselves and supply services to other bodies.

The suggestion is that that will abolish the two-tier structure of the NHS. However, the Bill provides for four tiers of primary care, and will allow no choice. At least in the two-tier structure there was some choice. Fundholders and their patients will lose out. If we examine the divisions of care between those in primary care groups at level 1 and those in primary care trusts at level 4, we see a genuine two, three or four-tier effect.

The Bill will not produce a more efficient or effective NHS. In rural areas such as my constituency, the Bill will bring together GPs' practices spread over many miles,

[Mr. Robert Walter]

which have little in common, other than that when added together they make a unit that suits the civil service maths for a primary care group and, eventually, a primary care trust. Is that an efficient way to run a primary care delivery system? Who will attend the meetings of the board? Will practices send their best GP, the senior partner and the man who is most effective at delivering care on the ground? Or will they send their least effective GP, the man who can be spared from the surgery for half a day to go to a meeting that is possibly some 20 or 30 miles away. When he comes back and tells the practice about the decisions, will the other GPs feel ownership of the decisions, if their least effective man has been sent along as a placeman to sit on the board? It is difficult enough for GPs to work within their own practices, let alone to work with GPs who may be 20 or 30 miles away in other practices. Committee meetings will also be a call on GPs' time, which has not been accounted for in the costs of the Bill.

Abolishing fundholding is a fundamental mistake. Fundholding has received many plaudits from virtually every source other than the Government. The British Medical Association said a couple of years ago that fundholding is

"a good model for encouraging consumer accountability into the NHS . . . GPs are truly willing to share the decision-making process with their patients."

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, an external body, stated:

"Within the range of services that they are permitted to purchase, GPs do seem to have done a better job of purchasing than district Health Authorities. Fund-holders have been more prepared to diversify providers, challenge hospital practices and to demand improvements."

The Audit Commission, a body that cannot be associated with Ministers from Governments of either party, made the most telling observation in March last year, when it said:

"Most fund-holders have introduced . . . improvements, including more services for patients at practice premises, improved communication with hospitals, and more cost-effective drug prescribing."

It seems that the wider benefits of fundholding are clear to everyone except the Government. Fundholders have been able to secure shorter waiting times for their patients operations. GPs have managed their practice budgets and have been able to develop new specialist services for their patients. Fundholding has encouraged greater communication and provides a way to involve GPs in the wider planning and management of the NHS. Fundholders have been able to manage their premises budgets, to develop and improve their surgeries and waiting rooms for the benefit of patients. The ability to perform minor surgical procedures in GPs' practices has been developed as a result of that greater autonomy. Because the patient is closer to the centre of decision making, fundholding has encouraged greater accountability in the health service and access to the executive process for patients.

In the time available, I have dealt with the provision for primary care that the Bill contains. It contains other measures, including provision for quality, under NICE and CHIMP. The provisions on drug pricing will be onerous for the supply of drugs to patients, and the Bill also contains provisions on professional regulation. However, it will do little to improve health care in Britain. The provision of primary care will take a step backwards as a result of the Bill. It could have been better drafted to provide efficient and effective control of the NHS and, at the end of the day, the Bill will be seen as unnecessary.

6.59 pm

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I welcome the Bill and the changes taking place in the new national health service. Given the time limit on Back-Bench speeches, I shall comment principally on primary care groups and the context in which they arise. I shall focus on the Bedford primary care group.

Primary care groups have just begun their work. They are sub-committees of local health authorities and will meet in public and conduct their business openly. That is an important fact. At their meetings, they will, de facto, afford community health councils the observer status sought by those councils. There may be some positive purpose in formally recognising the observer status that has been requested, because community health councils are drawn from local communities, local authorities and the voluntary sector, and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider whether that requirement could be included in regulation and to comment on that when he sums up.

The Bedford primary care group covers a population of 145,000 people served by 25 GP practices and 75 general practitioners. I have recently spoken to the chairman of the new PCG about his views and those of his colleagues on the board as to the future prospects for the PCG. He is positive about two aspects. First, he saw the opportunities inherent in an approach to the development and delivery of health care commissioned by people who are in daily contact with patients. That is most important. There are seven GPs, a practice nurse and a health visitor on the Bedford PCG. Those people can see at once what is happening on the ground; they can relate the strategies and plans of health authorities and others to the reality of life in the community.

The second positive aspect is the concept and the practice—as we shall see—of a unified budget. Initially, 40 per cent. of the capitation will be devolved to the area covered by the PCG—£32 million for the Bedford PCG. The official target is that that must rise to 60 per cent. by April next year, but the Bedfordshire health authority and the five PCGs in Luton and Bedfordshire are forming a commissioning consortium, or forum, that has as one of its aims a devolved budget of 100 per cent. by next spring.

The Bedford primary care group sees the new funding arrangements as providing—in the words of the chairman of the new PCG—"an exciting opportunity" for a more cost-effective and holistic approach to expenditure. For example, the new arrangements offer the opportunity to choose to spend more on certain drugs for patients who are still at home, still in the community and at work. Under previous arrangements, that would have overspent the cash-limited drugs budget and the spending would not have taken place. Now that spending can happen and, as a result, money can be saved at the other end of the process—the hospital emergency treatment end. That could represent an overall saving of resources that could be redeployed or reinvested in developments. There would also be a reduction in stress for patients, which would be good for individuals, their families and society.

People are enthusiastic about the prospects for the groups—especially the medium and long-term prospects. We realise that when something new starts, there will be short-term problems during the bedding-down process. Fundholders and non-fundholders are now working together on the Bedford PCG board and that is another good feature of the reforms. The former fundholders have some concerns that the new arrangements might make budget decisions more difficult in the short term and that there might be some difficulties in continuing some of the innovations that they introduced in fundholding practices. I acknowledge that—as do the Government. No one is trying to hide that, but the important point is that there is now a greater vision for the greater good, and that is accepted by the Bedford PCG. The benefits should exist for the many, not only for the few—benefits for the whole country, not merely for those patients whose doctors happen to be members of a fundholding practice.

There is a will to make the new system work. It is accepted that the innovations of fundholding should apply to the whole country. I accept that there were innovations in fundholding that benefited some patients, but they should apply to everyone. It is also accepted by many people—including those to whom I have spoken in Bedford—that fundholding could not be the mechanism to deliver the expansion of improved services to all, because of the inherent contradictions in the system. The system had high transaction costs as part of the bureaucratic internal market; it was based on competition, not co-operation and, by its very nature, made planning and long-term thinking difficult. It was inherently destabilising to the national health service.

Apart from the important new duty of quality that has been mentioned by other hon. Members, the Bill also introduces a new duty of co-operation and partnership, not only within the NHS, but outside. There will be partnership with the voluntary sector, local authorities, social services departments and employers—for example, in drawing up health improvement programmes. Consistent with that duty is the need to consult the public. On that subject, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to agree that community health councils should be consulted by primary care trusts—when that evolutionary step takes place—on significant changes in service, and that CHCs should have the right to inspect premises run by primary care trusts. In respect of the proposed changes to the legislative framework for NHS trusts, it would be reasonable for a requirement to be included that NHS trusts consult the public and CHCs on proposed changes to services or plans to dispose of or acquire sites.

What we are about now, in moving on from fundholding and in the other measures, is levelling upwards, commissioning services that people need. It is about returning to the historic founding principle of the national health service: top-quality medical care, accessible to all, based on need and never based on ability to pay. That historic principle is as important today as it was when it inspired the country 55 years ago. The Bill provides important measures and takes important steps to raise standards, to tackle health inequalities and to take the NHS forward as one of this country's greatest and finest achievements.

7.8 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): In the 10 minutes available to me, I want to concentrate my remarks on the effect of the Bill on the primary care world. I want to follow up some of the remarks made by my right hon. and hon. Friends about fundholding and to pick up a particular question posed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe): what do the Government envisage as being the long-term role of a primary care trust? That question is unanswered in the Bill and in its supporting notes.

I begin with a little NHS history. When Enoch Powell was Health Minister in the early 1960s, he made speeches about the importance of making the hospital sector of the health service more accountable to general practice and to people who are in day-to-day contact with patients. That theme was followed up in speeches made by Conservative and Labour Health Ministers through the 1960s, 70s and 80s. If there had been word processors in those days, that text would have been on the word processor. In 1990, those who examined the British national health service started to notice that 30 years of rhetoric about the need to make the hospital service more accountable to general practice was suddenly being converted into action.

The famous aphorism that Christmas cards flowed from general practitioners to hospital consultants was reversed in 1990 when consultants suddenly found a need to send Christmas cards to GPs. The House must ask itself whether it was just a massive historical coincidence that the extra accountability of the hospital service to GPs happened when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) introduced GP fundholding and the reforms of 1990. Or was there some cause and effect? I believe that there was: my right hon. and learned Friend's reforms, in which I had the honour to play a minor role, strengthened the effective voice of general practice within the NHS, achieving what 30 years of rhetoric had failed to bring about by making the hospital service more accountable to general practitioners, and through them to patients.

The Government continue to make the same speeches about the importance of the secondary care sector being responsive to the wishes of the primary care sector. Ministers apparently believe that the change in the centre of influence of the health service that happened in the early 1990s can be sustained by primary care groups. I wish that I agreed, but I do not.

The key difference between the fundholding regime introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend as an option for all GPs and the primary care groups is that the 1990 regime gave each practice the right to decide where the funds available to support patient care should go. Under the PCG system, groups will be so large that the individual GP will lose the effective right to make those decisions on behalf of patients.

I do not apologise for the fact that when I was Secretary of State I facilitated the coming together in larger commissioning organisations of GPs who wished to do so. The key difference between the range of options mentioned by the hon. Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) and the primary care groups is that a fundholding practice that went into a multi-fund or took part in a larger purchasing co-operative participated voluntarily. If the practice was not satisfied with the decisions taken in the larger co-operative, it could go away and do its own thing better. Under the Government's scheme, participation in PCGs is compulsory.

I have no quarrel with the Government's desire to open the option of purchasing to a wider range of patients. If GPs feel that that is the best way to deliver care to

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

patients, I have no problem with it. However, the key failing of the PCG idea is that participation is compulsory. The authority and power that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe gave to individual practices is being taken away and given to a new tier of bureaucracy. If Ministers believe that the Government will go down in history for cutting NHS administrative costs by creating a new tier of bureaucracy in the administration of PCGs, they have a greater faith than I do in the capacity of bureaucrats to cut bureaucratic costs.

My first point, then, is that the PCG weakens the capacity of individual general practitioners to make the structure of the health service account to the needs and wishes of patients. The Bill should be opposed for that reason.

My second theme follows the question put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald. What will be the long-term purpose of the primary care trust, and what, in the Government's vision of the world, is the future of general practice delivered by independent contractors?

The Bill makes it clear that as well as having the authority to regulate the general medical services sector, primary care trusts will have the power to deliver general medical services currently delivered by GPs. Presumably, PCTs are able to deliver those services only by employing GPs. In which circumstances do the Government expect that model to be followed? That is a critical question, and I hope that the Minister will respond to it.

General medical services are one of the great unchallenged success stories of the NHS since its foundation, and that success lies at the heart of primary care. The health service was established on two key principles. First, a GP is a self-employed professional; secondly, he delivers his service as an independent contractor against a national contract, traditionally known as the red book. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe rewrote many aspects of the red book when he was Secretary of State, but he did not change that basic principle.

One important change was made to that principle under the previous Government in the National Health Service (Primary Care) Act 1997, for which I was responsible. It introduced for the first time the principle of local contracting, as opposed to the national contract. It also introduced the principle that there could be employed GPs as well as self-employed contractors. Both innovations were made for good reasons, but they were introduced on the basis that participation must be voluntary. Assurances had to be given to the vast majority of GPs that the option of delivering general medical services on the traditional basis would remain open.

When the Government introduce primary care trusts, giving PCTs the power to employ people to deliver general medical services, they must be crystal clear about when the PCT will have the right to employ a GP and about the circumstances in which a PCT will be empowered to deliver services in competition with independent professionals that the PCTs are obliged to regulate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.18 pm

Mr. Ivan Lewis (Bury, South): I am delighted to support a Bill that reinforces much work already begun to modernise the national health service. The key themes of quality, partnership and accountability define the principles that should underpin an NHS truly fit for the 21st century. The Government have demonstrated their commitment to the NHS by providing £21 billion over the next three years.

The Bill proves, however, the Government's belief that that commitment is not only about extra resources. In return for our investment, we must make sure that patients in every community up and down the country experience significant improvement in the quality of health care. The Bill also draws a line beneath Tory health policy, which did so much to disfigure the NHS. Competition, inequality of access to services and underfunding combined to undermine public confidence in the NHS, though never public support for it.

Every opportunity should be taken to give people a history lesson about what the previous Government attempted to do with the NHS and to expose the Conservative party's plans for and philosophical beliefs about the future of the NHS. It is interesting that the health service is one of the few areas in which the Conservative party has begun to articulate an alternative policy agenda.

In a recent speech to the Social Market Foundation, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) called for a significant increase in the number of people being encouraged—I assume by the state—to take out private health insurance, and suggested that that policy should be supported by the Government through tax relief. Whenever we make that accusation and claim that that is what the Opposition are saying, they shake their head and deny that they believe that one way to improve quality in the health service is to increase the number of patients using the private sector, so I shall quote briefly from a speech that the hon. Gentleman made. He said:

"Each and every one of our competitor countries has a larger personal healthcare sector. What becomes clear from looking at other countries is that we are losing out by not encouraging the expansion of personal healthcare. If we are to catch up with others, and deliver the standard of healthcare this country deserves, we need to build a larger public-personal mix. We need to add a thriving personal sector to the public sector NHS we already have."

It is perfectly clear from what the hon. Gentleman says that he believes, as a fundamental principle and philosophy, that the way to improve the NHS is to encourage large numbers of people to leave the NHS and use private health care.

On 28 January, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) told the parliamentary Press Gallery lunch:

"I think if somebody wants to pay to see their GP, they should be encouraged to do so . . . The problem with the NHS is that we do not charge for much of what we do."

However one dresses up or explains those statements, it is clear that the Conservative party is advocating privatisation by stealth. It is advocating what it did when it was in power—it effectively privatised the long-term care of the elderly and community care. The Conservatives were not brave enough to tell the people of

this country that they wanted to privatise the health service because they understood the political consequences of that. We will take every opportunity—

Mr. Hammond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: No, I shall not give way. I have only 10 minutes.

We will take every opportunity to tell the people of this country what the Conservatives' agenda would be if they were ever to be given control of the health service again.

Mr. Duncan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: No, I am sorry.

The Conservatives spoke about the dispossessed. Whether they did so in the context of health care or in the context of social deprivation, how dare they claim to be the friends of the dispossessed. For 18 years, they created more dispossessed than any Government in the history of this country. They also created a greater gap between rich and the poor than we had ever seen.

I deal now with some specific provisions in the Bill. Primary care trusts will be the natural evolution of the primary care groups, up and running since 1 April. Collaboration and teamwork will replace divisiveness and inequality of access to treatment. The service will undoubtedly benefit from GPs working more closely with other health and social care professionals. We have heard about the fear that GPs who are not very good will hold back those who are innovative and imaginative and who want to make flexible use of resources, but surely bringing GPs together in PCGs and PCTs will mean that peer group pressure will be applied to those who are not doing the job in the way we want and in a way that will enhance the quality of care available to patients. There was much cynicism and scepticism about PCGs before 1 April, but we can all evidence the commitment and work that health care professionals have put in to making them work.

There is also a new emphasis on quality, as exemplified by the establishment of the Commission for Health Improvement and the new statutory duty for quality. These measures will ensure that mechanisms are in place to monitor and evaluate quality at a local level, and to allow for speedy intervention when it is clear that things are going wrong. For too long there has been a disparity of quality depending on where one lives, or perhaps because quality was put to the bottom of the agenda by hard-pressed managers who were weighed down by the bureaucracy of the internal market. The Government are committed to ensuring that quality is the central driving force behind the modernisation and development of the NHS. That common sense dictates that the concept of partnership is the key to securing lasting health improvement and the most effective use of finite resources. At last there is an explicit duty of co-operation between NHS bodies, and between NHS and other local agencies.

When I was first elected to the House, one of the things that horrified me was the fact that health authorities, health trusts and local authorities slated each other in the local media for the difficulties experienced by patients. There was a culture not of collaboration, but of passing the buck and blaming other agencies. There is absolutely no doubt that the new approach to partnership and collaboration is making a real difference in the relationship between the agencies.

We should remember, however, that organisations cannot really have relationships—it is the professionals and other people who work in them who need to develop mutual respect and confidence. The Government are creating a variety of vehicles to enable people from different disciplines to have regular contact and dialogue, and to work collaboratively to ensure that patients get the best possible deal. For example, local health improvement programmes will bring together not only the relevant statutory agencies, but the voluntary sector and carers and users in genuine partnership.

Under previous partnerships, statutory agencies issued draft proposals, and others were asked to comment on them at a final stage. This is about genuine partnership, whereby from the beginning, people from all sectors, including users and carers, identify local priorities and together set about meeting them.

We should also welcome the new pooled budget arrangements between health and social services, and the flexibility that will be given to health authorities to transfer money to social services departments where that is deemed appropriate. Some of us would like a much closer organisational integration between health and social care, but if these developments improve the relationship between health and social care and ensure that users get a seamless service, they will be an important step forward.

In conclusion, the Bill provides further evidence of the Government's commitment to constant improvement of the NHS in response to ever-changing needs and demands. The British people believe in and are proud of their NHS. The Bill will help us to deliver the quality of service that they deserve.

7.27 pm

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): It was remarkable that the Secretary of State spent so little time on the Bill. He capped it all by refusing to accept any interventions in the little time that he spent outlining the virtues of the Bill. What we got instead was the umpteenth edition of the Dobson rant. I rather wished that we were in the Senate in America, so that the relevant bit could have been read into the record. It would then have appeared in *Hansard*, and we could have got on with discussing the real issues rather than listening to the same thing yet again. What we had today does not contribute to the serious health debate that we ought to be having, and which patients and our constituents would want us to have.

As has been said, primary care groups are central to the Bill. As has been agreed, about 60 per cent. of GPs had become fundholders by the end of the last Parliament. Clearly, there are different views, and I dare say that a certain subjectivity entered the debate on the pros and cons of the various alternatives. However, let us consider the objective views of those outside the House, such as the Audit Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and most doctors. Also, Professor Brian Abel-Smith, a noted adviser to Labour, told the Government, "Whatever you do, don't destroy fundholding—it has been a success." That is the view of independent people.

As the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) said, the opportunity was there to accept what was good in fundholding, build on it and deal with the 40 per cent.

[Mr. John Horam]

or so of GPs who had not yet got into the fundholding system. But no, in the spirit of levelling down, the Government had to destroy everything, the good as well as the unproven, and possibly even the bad, and bring in the new system of PCGs.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), the former Secretary of State for Health, said, the crucial difference is that whereas it was possible for decisions to be taken by one doctor, or at most by two or three in a group, and for doctors to own their decisions and be responsible for them, decisions are now being made by perhaps 50 or 100 doctors in one commissioning group.

I am an economist, and economists are famous for not agreeing, or for finding it very difficult to agree, with each other. I am sure that doctors are much more able, perhaps 100 or 200 per cent. more able, to agree with each other than are economists, but the idea of getting 50 or 100 doctors to agree with each other, with nurses, laymen, administrators, carers and all the others who are rightly in these groups, and with committees and sub-committees of committees is nonsensical. Therefore, although I accept the point made by Labour Members that professional doctors and nurses will try to make the system work—because they want to do so if at all possible and because they have no alternative—no one can get round the fact that it is cumbersome, elaborate and bureaucratic. In addition, it is expensive.

A further point, which was made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), is that the system is compulsory. It is compulsory not only in the sense that the Secretary of State says, "You, as a GP, have to join the system", but in the sense that GPs must do so on his terms.

It so happens that my health authority, Bromley, was not particularly strong on fundholding. Quite a small proportion of doctors were members of fundholding practices. As a result, the health authority set up a commissioning system. A small group of GPs and nurses, representing all the GP practices in the health authority area, was formed. The system was developed, and was being put through under the previous Government. Indeed, it was so successful that officials from Whitehall went to study exactly what was happening in Bromley. It was, to some extent, a model of the commissioning proposed for primary care groups.

In conducting such pioneering work, Bromley was well ahead of other health authorities in dealing with questions concerning GP fundholding and practice groups. However, the Government were not content to accept the model, saying that it did not fit into the Whitehall man's view of things. Bromley was told: "You cannot go ahead with that. One group for an entire health authority is not right; you must have three or four"—no evidence was given of why there should be three or four—"groups, scrap all your work and start again."

As a result, Bromley is the last in the health authority queue in the country. Indeed, it is so late in its preparation that it is having to postpone the introduction of primary care groups until 1 July, whereas most are being introduced on 1 April. All the work that was done has had to be done all over again because Bromley's version of it—even though it formed a model used by the Government—was not satisfactory. That shows the extent to which the Government are prepared to accept only the exact model of what they are looking for. That is dictatorial and profoundly unsatisfactory in encouraging local initiative.

While on the question of Whitehall man, the Secretary of State claimed in his speech that, as a result of the proposed measures, financial planning would be better accomplished. All I can say is that financial planning has not been well served in Bromley by the methods that he has so far introduced. For example, money for winter pressures was allocated in the middle of December. Despite Ministers being used to flying by Concorde and going scuba diving during debates on the Budget, they must surely have some grasp of reality. Anybody knows that to allocate money for winter pressures in the middle of December is ridiculous.

As a result, there were huge trolley waits in Bromley hospitals in January. Elderly women—one was more than 80 years old—were on trolleys for many hours as a direct consequence of the trust's inability to plan because the Government failed to take decisions in time and wrapped everything up in red tape.

The perception of the hospital system among ordinary people has been severely damaged by the Government's lack of action and the expectations that they raised. Not only have there been trolley waits on such a scale as never before in Bromley, but waiting lists have not been reduced as the Government promised. Admittedly, Bromley is a particularly good performer. However, the number of people on the waiting list has fallen by only 320 to 6,430—a reduction of a few per cent. Not only that, the waiting list for the waiting list, which is not counted, has grown longer. Not only that, more operations are being cancelled than ever before. That is not recorded either. The possibility of admission to a bed through accident and emergency is now the worst on record.

The entire circumstances regarding waiting times—not merely waiting lists—are considerably worse in Bromley than in any previous year of which I know. That is the consequence of the Government's total failure to perceive the real nature of the problem.

As we are all aware—certainly on the Opposition Benches—it was evident to Conservative Members and to many eminent professionals in the health service that the Labour Opposition had developed no serious strategy for the NHS. The Labour party has demonstrated no serious strategy since it came to power—nothing which can be defined as a serious attempt to deal with the admitted problems of the health service. There is certainly nothing in the Bill to address them on the scale necessary.

Proposing evolutionary, practical, common-sense measures, which have always served the NHS well, will therefore fall to a future Conservative Government, as it always has. As we know, Conservative Governments have handled, looked after and protected the NHS for two thirds of its time. As a consequence, we have today's excellent health service—even though, admittedly, it cannot solve all its difficulties.

When my right hon. and hon. Friends resume power, they will come forward with a set of proposals which, distinct from the concept that the man in Whitehall knows best and the Government's centralised, bureaucratic and red tape-riddled proposals, will be based on a decentralised approach, encouraging and helping local

initiatives, trusting doctors, nurses and local managers and creating an atmosphere of co-operation with the private sector, instead of the hate for it that is so often displayed by Labour Members, and was again today. I hope that, when my right hon. and hon. Friends flesh out that package of measures appropriately, they will say, "Vote Conservative—to save our NHS".

7.37 pm

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): Although I have no pecuniary or registrable interest to declare, I am a member of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union, which incorporates community practitioners and the Health Visitors Association, and represents doctors and a wide variety of other professions in the health service.

I welcome this Bill and its attempts to overcome the obstacles to co-operative working which have been created by the internal market. I do not deny that there were some benefits of past reforms, and it is right that, in their new proposals, the Government have discarded the things that failed and have built on those that worked. In particular, I welcome the Government's commitment to and recognition of the important role of primary care.

The Bill builds on the themes set out in the White Papers: the need to improve the quality of service in the NHS, the need for the NHS to work together and in partnership with local government and the voluntary sector, and devolution of responsibility to a local level in shaping services that are relevant to local needs, enabling local decision making to get the best out of NHS resources, and giving responsibility locally for the promotion of the health of communities.

There has been widespread support throughout the NHS for the creation of primary care groups, which will develop the potential of primary care commissioning without the disadvantages of individual fundholding, which we know has been bureaucratic, divisive and costly. I welcome the abolition of the so-called internal market—a pernicious system which, as the Secretary of State said, set hospital against hospital, and doctor and nurse against doctor and nurse, discouraged the sharing of information and created a two-tier system, providing better services for a few patients at the expense of others.

The market orientation of recent years has done little, if anything, to improve the efficiency of the service or widen the choice available to the majority of patients. The concept of competition has worked against co-operation between different parts of the service. That is why I warmly welcome the Government's approach of replacing competition with co-operation and introducing a new duty of partnership.

I welcome the introduction of health improvement plans, which will provide the framework for commissioning decisions and enable improvements in health to be achieved. That is a clear shift in focus for the NHS toward outputs rather than inputs. Increasingly, we shall be looking at outcomes and what ought to be achieved. But for those health improvement programmes to work, there needs to be a strong community and voluntary sector and carer involvement in consultation on those plans. I hope that the Minister of State will require those plans to be published and full consultation to take place. I hope that in his summing up, he will say how those consultation mechanisms through health improvement boards will work. My concern is that, without that clear guidance from the Department, it may be premature to seek the abolition of the joint consultative committees.

I warmly welcome the Government's promotion of the public health agenda. Health and health care are vitally influenced by poverty, bad housing, poor diet, low expectations, lack of educational opportunity and social exclusion. The Government are tackling all those issues. Many years ago the Black report and more recently the Acheson report have drawn attention to the health inequities across the country due to environmental and economic factors. That is why it is of the utmost importance that we promote co-operative working between health and local authorities, not just between health authorities and social services departments, but with the whole range of local government services—with housing, education, leisure and recreation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis) said, the Bill provides an opportunity to break down many of the barriers that exist to co-operative working in those spheres.

I want to mention the introduction of primary care groups and the concept of a primary care-led NHS. I have some questions to ask the Minister of State. I emphasise that, in my view, it should be a primary care-led NHS and not necessarily a GP-led NHS.

I want to focus on the contribution of nursing to the modern NHS. I believe that the potential that nursing can offer must be maximised. I welcome the introduction by the previous Government, and the expansion by the present Government, of nurse prescribing. Nurse practitioners are already running outreach health clinics, minor injuries services, family planning and sexual health clinics. Nurses are often the prime professionals involved in health education and health promotion programmes such as those dealing with alcohol abuse, with breast care, with osteoporosis and with testicular cancer. Patients with chronic diseases have benefited from the development of nurse-led care, and it is nurses who act as a resource for many non-health professionals in health education and health promotion programmes.

In my constituency at the Bevan centre, a short-term intermediate care centre providing intensive rehabilitative care and support to patients who would otherwise be blocking far more expensive beds in an acute hospital, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other health care workers are providing more relevant quality care and more intensive support than patients could expect to receive in a district general hospital, and at far less cost to the NHS.

The maximum encouragement must be given to innovative developments in nurse and therapist-led care. In that respect, I find it regrettable that only two primary care groups have a nurse as their chair. The Government's arrangements for primary care groups require each PCG to have one or two nurses on its board. Although I acknowledge that that is recognition of the vital contribution that nurses can make to commissioning local health services and of the specific expertise that nurses can bring, I question the necessity to provide for an in-built majority of GPs on primary care groups—and why was the contribution of nurses limited to two?

It is envisaged that primary care groups will develop into primary care trusts. I believe that there is much that we should learn from the lessons of the establishment of

[Mr. John Austin]

the PCGs. In some parts of the country, there were failings in the consultation process by which the primary care groups were established, in that working community nurses and professions allied to medicine were excluded from the consultation or from significant influence. In many areas, the trade unions and professional organisations at local level were not even nominally involved in the consultation. I hope that that will be remedied as the PCGs move to primary care trust status.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) has said that, in some areas, GPs are reluctant to spend time on PCG boards. I can assure the Minister of State that there is no shortage of nurses who are willing to serve and that members of professions allied to medicine would welcome the opportunity to sit on such boards, but have no direct entitlement to do so.

In addition to nurses, who I believe are very important, why should we not include community pharmacists, opticians and physiotherapists, along with other professionals who need to be involved in building the best possible primary care? The voluntary sector, service users and carers all also need to be very much involved in the process.

I understand that the Minister of State, in his letter of 19 February, requires the executive of the level 3 primary care trust boards to have up to seven GPs, two nurses and a professional with public health promotion expertise. I question whether it is right to guarantee a GP majority in that structure—why not have parity between GPs and nurses and other professions allied to medicine?

I have no objection to a majority of GPs if they are the best and most appropriate persons for the job. My concern is that the decision to enshrine a majority for GPs has been taken without justification, and without consideration of a fair selection process to ensure that the best possible persons get the jobs.

I also seek Ministers' assurance regarding the composition of the trust executive board at level 4 primary care trust level—an assurance that membership will be chosen on the basis of clear job descriptions, founded on a clearly defined function of the trust, with the best people getting the job, and not with a reserve majority for any profession.

I also want to mention equity of access. In the debate in another place, reference was made to discrimination on the grounds of age, race or gender. I hope that, in light of the Macpherson report, the Minister will give consideration to putting an equal opportunity commitment on the face of the Bill. I am aware that NICE and the national service framework provide a move forward to equity of access, but I believe that a stress on equality of opportunity is important.

I also want to refer briefly to consultation on changes in service delivery. There is a responsibility on health authorities to consult with community health councils. There is no such responsibility on NHS trusts, and there is none in the Bill, which refers to a responsibility on the primary care trusts to consult community health councils.

Often, CHCs are involved in consultation on health authority decisions when the decisions are already cut and dried. I hope that the Minister of State will consider amending the 1996 health council regulations to ensure full consultation with community health councils. I recognise the importance of the Commission for Health Improvement, but CHCs are also important, and I wonder whether my hon. Friend might consider giving the same right of access and information to community health councils as is given to the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.47 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin). He expressed concerns about equality of access to primary care groups. I suspect that one reason why the doctors seem to have had more access than others is that they have the muscle. The harsh reality is that, although we have been told today that the British Medical Association supports the moves, there are deep concerns among some doctors, expressed by the BMA, on the matter. Those doctors are concerned that, having moved to start up the primary care groups, working hard with the support and encouragement of the BMA, they may be forced to move too quickly into the primary care trusts, which will take away some of the local output that they prize.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was surprised that the Bill would legislate for Scotland and for Wales although, in a matter of weeks, Scotland and Wales will be responsible for their own health care—and yet Northern Ireland has been excluded, except in a few particulars. I often wonder whether that was because the draftsmen did not have time to adjust the legislation to suit Northern Ireland, where there is a closer intertwining between health and social services. Did they really imagine that the Northern Ireland Assembly would be running ahead of both Scotland and Wales, when full devolution is not scheduled to occur until next year at the earliest? I regret that, at times, we have had to legislate for Northern Ireland by Order in Council without proper debate in the House, and that things have slipped through that have not been in the best interests of good law or the best service of the people.

Some of the changes are helpful, but I trust that the Government will not follow the procedures that the previous Administration adopted when reforming management. Redundancy payments were made to those who were losing their jobs, who moved into the next district council and obtained similar jobs, having received handouts. About £19 million has already been listed for redundancies but GP fundholders are concerned that there may not be adequate funds for that purpose.

It has been suggested during the debate that the Bill will lead to a reduction in bureaucracy. When we reduce bureaucracy the millennium will be upon us, and I am not thinking of the year 2000. Following the previous round of changes within the NHS, staff moved into different positions. In Northern Ireland we set up boards which were transformed largely into trusts, and many of those who were involved in the change moved into the trusts. I believe that something similar will happen following the Bill's enactment. When we are crying out for money for front-line services, it is not right that we should be paying those who have already been given redundancy money to work in another area of the health service. We should be more careful about how we transfer people from one post to another.

I was surprised to hear the Secretary of State proudly saying that the pharmaceutical industry was supportive of the Bill. I am sure that most of us have received the briefing from the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry. It is true that it has welcomed some of the improvements to the Bill that were made in the other place, but it still shows tremendous concern about what might happen to one of the few surviving prosperous British industries. I know that we are living in the age of information technology and that that area of knowledge will create many jobs. However, I hope that the Government will not repeat the follies of previous Administrations who reduced the influence of some vital British industries to the detriment of our nation and the betterment of development elsewhere.

I share the Secretary of State's concern about those in the pharmaceutical industry who may not be playing fair. On the other hand, we must be careful that we do not destroy one of the most successful industries in the United Kingdom. I hope that the Government will abide by their own regulations. As I understand it from a briefing and from my knowledge of the situation, the Government were obliged by their understanding of the regulations carefully to specify best regulatory practice. They set forth their principles in "The Better Regulation Guide and Regulatory Impact Assessment".

In his foreword, the Prime Minister wrote that

"no regulatory proposal which has an impact on businesses, charities and voluntary bodies should be considered by the Government without a thorough assessment of the risks, costs and benefits, a clear analysis of who will be affected and an explanation of why non-regulatory action would be insufficient. This requirement applies whenever Ministers or their officials are seeking to clear a new proposal for primary or secondary legislation or a negotiating line that will result in such legislation."

The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry said clearly that such an exercise has not been conducted in regard to the Bill. If the Government are expecting others to abide by the law, they should set the example. If it is true that that has not been done, I trust that matters will be taken forward so that those who examine the Bill in Committee can proceed with greater precision.

I left the Chamber for a short time but it is my understanding that the matter to which I am about to refer has not yet been taken up, and that is the concern of Mencap and the correct desire of the Government to integrate services so as to bring professionals together in an efficient way. Mencap feels that there has been insufficient concern to ensure that services for people with learning disabilities are fully integrated with other community services rather than being treated separately with mental health provision. I ask the Minister to clarify the Government's proposals. Mencap would call on the Government to prioritise preventive health care for people with learning disabilities and to incorporate funding into health improvement programme budgets to provide for proper consultation.

We are dealing with the general principles of the Bill, and one of them is co-operation between health professionals. If we are developing care in the community, an important role rests with occupational therapists. For whatever reason, we seem not to have enough of them. If there are waiting lists for hospital appointments as a result of doctors' assessments, occupational therapists must make assessments of what is needed in individual homes and what is needed for individuals personally as aids to enable them to remain in the community. At present, a couple of months pass before the occupational therapist comes along. Thereafter, months pass before the requisite body, be it a housing organisation or whatever, gets on with the job of providing what is needed. I trust that those issues will be considered fully in Committee.

7.57 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): I have no registerable interest, although I did spend most of this morning in a hospital out-patient department thinking about the Bill. Indeed, I did so yesterday morning as well. Each day brings a new department. As I watched hard-pressed doctors, nurses and administrators, and anxious patients bearing up with quiet fortitude, I asked myself whether the Bill would connect with the situation and experiences that I was observing. Those who are involved would have in their mind, if they were thinking about matters in this way, whether the Bill would make things better. That is all that people want to know. Will their health service become better because of legislation that the House might pass?

I suggest that in two respects the Bill will make things better while a third area might prove to be more troublesome. I believe that our proposals for primary care groups and primary care trusts will make things better. I listened with interest to the argument between those who are passionate defenders of fundholding and those on the Government Benches who want to see the end of it. I speak as someone who was interested in the innovations that fundholding brought, but wanted to see if we could preserve those innovations while removing the inequities attached to them. I saw patients in my constituency benefiting from the innovations that fundholding brought, including the extra clout that it gave to general practitioners within the health care system. I saw also patients not benefiting from fundholding and, indeed, suffering because other people were benefiting from it.

The very proper question is, "Can we retain the virtues of fundholding while remedying its defects?" I think that I am the first hon. Member to use the language of the third way tonight: this is a third way Bill which says that we can try to make universal the extra clout that fundholding brought for some by working, not individually and competitively, but collectively in each locality so that all general practitioners are able to work together to empower themselves. They, in turn, will empower their patients.

The Bill is innovative and does not simply say, "Let's rid ourselves absolutely of all that fundholding involved and revert to a top-down, bureaucratic planning system." It says, "Let's see if we can't devise a more flexible, locally based but collaborative arrangement that would retain the virtues, but remove the iniquities and disadvantages." I think that that is what we are doing.

I am interested that the Opposition prefer other strategies—on the whole, exit strategies. If the Government are, to use the jargon, introducing a voice strategy, then exit strategies such as fundholding and disconnecting oneself from collective provision or assisted places in education are perfectly legitimate ways of thinking about how to manage problems inside public services. They are not, however, systems to which most people in this country feel attached and they do not

[Dr. Tony Wright]

preserve equity. We want to preserve equity and innovation, which is what the Bill will do and I welcome that without reservation.

The second issue, about which I feel similarly, is the quality agenda. There is not time to say a great deal—other hon. Members have spoken about it—but the neglect of that agenda inside the health service over 50 long years has been extraordinary and, in many respects, criminal. We have talked only about how much money we put into the service, and how we organise and structure it, not about how effective it is clinically.

It has taken the appalling Bristol case to make us see the cost of that neglect. People say, "How could that kind of system continue for so long without anyone knowing about it or, if they knew, without doing anything about it?" It happened because we did not put in place the mechanisms of clinical monitoring and clinical accountability to which the health service should have been subject a long time ago. I pay tribute to all the doctors who work inside the service, but there is no question that the lack of audit and performance monitoring, although widespread in the service, has been particularly acute in the primary care sector.

There has been no clinical monitoring of GPs: the family health services authorities simply paid cheques to doctors and there is huge variation in the clinical performance of GPs. I hope that the primary care groups and primary care trusts will lever up standards and quality right through primary care—not only for those who were able to enjoy the advantages of the fundholding system—and the rest of the system. I would welcome that without reservation, too.

I hope that the Government will take steps to ensure that the measures that the General Medical Council is taking—after some discussion and, in some quarters, resistance—to make sure that there is effective clinical appraisal and reappraisal of all doctors are implemented.

In those two big, critical areas, I support what the Government are doing. The third issue is obvious, but indispensable—money. I represent South Staffordshire health authority, which is in financial crisis. This year, it is running a £7.5 million deficit. We shall talk to the Minister about that and we hope that we will receive assistance, but I do not want to press that point now. My point is that people in this country overwhelmingly want the health service to improve, but we are subject to a permanent revenue constraint. The Opposition say that there will always be such a constraint and that we have to resolve the problem by exploring the private sector, but that is not the position of Labour Members. Nor is it the position of the Government.

Nevertheless, we have a conundrum: most people in this country do not want the health service to stand still financially; they want it to improve and they want more money—a lot more money—to be spent on it year on year in real terms. They know that it is underfunded in relative terms. The time has come to find some kind of dedicated, hypothecated new income stream that can give the NHS a secure funding base so that it does not live from financial statement to financial statement—even from three-yearly financial statement to three-yearly financial statement. That is the real challenge behind the Bill.

I believe that in May 1997 the NHS came home—in a real sense, not only in a rhetorical sense. It came home to the people who set it up and it has come home to the people who depend upon it and work in it. The Opposition say, "That home will never be adequate. We have to build new little homes in the garden and make people live in them." However, those of us who want the health service to inhabit that home must ensure that it is secure and that it is not only patched up to keep the water out, but improved in real terms year on year.

8.7 pm

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): It is interesting to speak after the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright), because his concluding comments reflect a state of frank despair in the area that I represent: it has had one of the lowest funding increases in the country, although it has a low mortality rate but quite high morbidity and very high costs of living. People find that the continual rhetoric of the Government—the spin, the message that money is no problem and the endless new packages and new initiatives—makes their lives more and more difficult.

Before this Second Reading, I decided to revisit my health authority trusts and those taking forward the primary care group. I was struck, with great surprise, by the despair, frustration and, in some cases, fear that they feel. They have been made to feel that it is unacceptable to complain and put their head above the parapet. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) mentioned the hospital in Salisbury, I noticed that officials instantly left the Box. I hope—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Lady should know better. She should not refer anyone outside the Chamber.

Mrs. Bottomley: I stand corrected, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I hope that the individuals concerned at Salisbury are well. I think that that is an appropriate comment. Southampton was also mentioned, and the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), has been on the Front Bench for some of the debate.

The hon. Member for Cannock Chase also talked about the tension between innovation and equity. New Labour is almost Soviet in its use of language; it uses words and phrases as though using them makes them true, but there is real tension between innovation and equity. Can the Minister say what is the scope for primary care groups or primary care trusts to take a different view? It is impossible to prohibit post code prescribing and encourage diversity and innovation. Many believe that a problem of the old NHS was that it was risk averse; that it was innovation averse. Growing numbers of people believe that the Stalinist command and control approach, led by Ministers now, makes trust and health authority chief executives and primary care groups think that they will be dumped on, that they will be named and shamed, if they take any risk or innovate.

But over the years, breakthroughs in the NHS have nearly always been achieved by an innovator, such as those at Addenbrooke's and the Southampton teaching hospitals. The first hip operations were not available to

all in the NHS; that depended on whether one lived near a teaching hospital. It was always the case that a GP who knew the system and had the contacts in the hospital could obtain treatment for his patients. I do not argue that that is a virtue, but to imply that there was a romantic past with a perfect system of equality is simply not the case. Innovation was the result of developments being taken forward and others wanting to follow.

Fundholding is now dead. The Government have brought an end to GP fundholding. But, for the life of me, I cannot understand how, if a scheme is voluntary, with funding on the basis of comparable funding, there is inequity. If Labour Members had criticisms of the mechanism of the funding, changes could easily be made, but they have substituted a desperately frustrating, bureaucratic collective.

A GP's job is incredibly demanding. I do not blame the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) for abandoning general practice and coming into the House of Commons. To work for 30 years as a GP is extremely demanding. Fundholding gave people a sense of empowerment; of being able to build the plan. It gave them leverage. The GPs whom I most enjoyed seeing were those who said that they would not be a fundholder but would do better. It gave them that empowerment. The worry about primary care groups is that they are frustrating and bureaucratic and move at the pace of the slowest. Every GP to whom I have spoken has repeated that message, even though many were not of my political persuasion. Therefore, I am extremely worried that innovation will be stultified and smothered. I am deeply worried about whether the experience for GPs will be more and more frustrating.

What are the financial and performance criteria for the primary care trusts? I would be reluctant to think that primary care trusts were driven through as a macho symbol for Ministers and I hope that Ministers will be able to be more explicit. The development of a primary care-led NHS is part of the evolutionary approach that the Bill represents. There has not been a great revolution. There has been massive rebadging, relabelling, and amnesia about the past. We have learned to be used to that with the new Labour regime. But the primary care-led NHS was cherished by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and many of the rest of us.

A possible way of helping those in my constituency through the gloom in which they currently exist because of the constrained funding for health and social services and the impossibility of taking forward decisions that will cause any amount of noise—keep the system quiet is the message that comes from those who work closely with Ministers—relates to the great hope that Farnham will have a community hospital for the 21st century. It has taken a long time to achieve that. But suddenly the accounting rules for surplus land and buildings under the PFI mean that its costings have been set right back. That was a sudden announcement with no warning and I ask the Minister to take it upon himself to assist the Surrey Hampshire Borders NHS trust to overcome that obstacle. It, to its great credit, has recognised that, rather than pursue a hospital with maternity and surgery facilities, and all the glamorous acute services, the community needs on-going day-to-day care for the elderly and the non-acute patients. It has lowered its expectations, but, after reaching agreement with the GPs, managers and local people, it desperately needs approval and endorsement. It will only have that with ministerial support.

I endorse the quality agenda. To return to the comments of the hon. Member for Cannock Chase, it is largely built on the growing recognition of medical practitioners that they cannot be entirely self-regulating. There are responsibilities of clinical governance. That has been a difficult transition. Audit within hospitals is now widespread and accepted and part of the training of junior doctors. The resistance in the early years was extraordinary. It is essential that the duty of quality is extended to the independent sector as much as to the NHS, not least because many publicly funded patients are cared for within the independent sector.

Similarly, the Commission for Health Improvement, which, again, is essentially an evolutionary and sensible development, needs further clarification. It is unrealistic to pay for CHIMP by taking the levy from the hospital that it is inspecting. It must be centrally funded. It must be like the Office for Standards in Education; otherwise, a hospital will have to pay the penalty for its problems and for the inspection.

I would also ask that the health improvement programmes are subject to a duty of consultation in which the voluntary groups must be involved. I speak as a patron of the Carers National Association, but there are many others who wish to see the consultation basis on the same level as that for the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Dr. Desmond Turner.

8.17 pm

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): It is nice to follow one of the previous Secretaries of State for Health. It was interesting to listen to them tonight. If one did not know better and simply took what they said at face value, one would wonder why we were having this debate and why there were any problems at all, because we should have a wonderful NHS. But the truth is that we do not. We have a health service which has been labouring under great difficulties—difficulties imposed by limitations of resources and by organisation regimes which have been focused not on patients or medicine but on finance and management. That has not produced the goods.

The opposition that we have heard today has been a mixture of the dreamy and the curmudgeonly, and a curious opposition from the Liberal Democrats who think that this a rather weak little Bill. They are missing rather a lot.

I, too, must declare an interest. I am also a member of the Manufacturing Science and Finance Union and a former medical scientist, and I am excited by the Bill. That is not because I am a sycophantic Government supporter. I am obviously a Government supporter, but I am no one's sycophant. I am excited because the Bill, in addition to the measures that have already been taken, puts us in a position to do something about some of the fundamental failures of the NHS to deliver on standards. It is the question of clinical standards that is most exciting in the Bill.

This country has some of the world's leading scientists in the field of cancer. British scientists have made fundamental contributions to the advance of cancer therapy. We are one of the world's leaders in cancer

[Dr. Desmond Turner]

research. Why, then, do the results of treatment in the national health service lag behind America and every other country in Europe, including Estonia? We have the worst cancer survival rates in the civilised world. How do we manage that? We have the talent, yet we get awful results. That tells me that there is something wrong with the way in which the system is operated.

Dr. Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Turner: No, I am sorry, I have only 10 minutes.

I am not suggesting that those results are the fault of particular individuals, and I do not think that suddenly revising the structure will cure the problem overnight, because it will not—things do not work that way. What the health service has lacked up till now—until the creation of NICE and CHIMP—is a mechanism not only for promulgating best practice, but for ensuring that best practice is acted upon. That is essential.

There is an awful lot of clinical literature, but whether the benefits of that literature are spread into patient care is a matter of chance. It depends on how much time consultants or general practitioners have to read the literature and how enthusiastic and conscientious they are.

Dr. Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Turner: I am sorry, I have only 10 minutes.

Some people are excellent, but not everyone achieves the standard of excellence; otherwise we would not have such awful clinical performance. That fact is inescapable. I hope that the Minister is listening, because the way in which I see NICE making its greatest contribution is in evaluating advances in medical research, evaluating new drugs from an independent perspective and circulating advice throughout the system so that we move towards a genuine evidence based approach to medical practice. Such an approach has been seriously lacking in our system, and that is largely why we do not achieve the results that we should.

NICE by itself is not the total answer. It cannot be, because there are also questions of clinical freedom and so forth. We need CHIMP to carry out inspections to ensure that research is taken notice of on the ground. If a CHIMP team inspects a hospital and finds that its clinical performance is seriously below par and that consultants are ignoring the guidance of NICE, I would expect an adverse report and something to be done in that hospital to improve clinical outcomes.

There is nothing revolutionary about this measure: it is perfectly logical. We undertake inspections in just about every other public service. We have inspected schools since for ever, and we inspect police forces and fire services. We inspect everything that moves, but we have never inspected the health service until now. It is long overdue, and it will make a very big difference.

There has been much discussion about whether vast sums are being added to health service budgets. We think that a lot of money has been provided. The Opposition opposed the increases in the comprehensive spending review, yet they tell us that they would have funded the health service rather better. I cannot square those two assertions.

Having put money into the health service, it is important that we make it count. That is why we need an organisation such as NICE. It should also examine the cost-effectiveness of clinical organisations and the cost-effectiveness of drugs as well as their immediate clinical input. The most expensive drug may, in the long term, be the cheapest. We can get such information only through a serious, in-depth, independent evaluation. We will not get it from the pharmaceutical companies, because they have an interest.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) was wise to point to the pharmaceutical industry. It is the only industry we have left with a solid research base, and it is inextricably linked with the national health service. It is a multinational industry that can move very quickly. The national health service has a large customer base. That is important, because it gives us the opportunity to negotiate a sharp deal with the drug companies; and it provides much employment for scientists. In return, if we succeed in raising the standards of the health service, we will provide a marvellous shop window for that industry.

I do not find this an insignificant little Bill. It is potentially an extremely important Bill.

8.27 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): This is a truly socialist Bill, in that it represents a triumph for the Secretary of State. It is a triumph of old Labour over new Labour. The Bill is a disaster, and it is a backward step for the national health service. I am astounded that two Labour Members have told the House that they are excited by the Bill, because when I listened to the Secretary of State's speech he did not seem to be excited by it. Indeed, he could not even be bothered to address the House on the Bill.

When Lord Howe responded to the introduction of the Bill in the House of Lords, he said that

"it is a Bill that seeks to undo much of the good resulting from the work of the previous administration. . . . a measure that, far from providing a platform for improvement, will instead be a recipe for inflexibility, inefficiency, lack of choice and, perhaps above all, tight central control of our health service by politicians in Westminster."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 February 1999; Vol. 597, c. 114.]

My noble Friend was entirely right.

We all know what the Secretary of State decided to do. He made one little announcement. It was supposed to be a public relations job for the Labour party. He failed to convince me, he failed to convince my constituents in Southend, West, and I think that he failed to convince anyone with a modicum of common sense. The national health service has been worse since we have had a Labour Government.

I think that someone at Millbank pressed the wrong button on the computer. Labour has had the cheek to mail a number of Conservative party members in Southend, West exhorting them to give money to the party in connection with the issue of the health service. First, the Labour party thanks my Conservative party members for voting for it in the general election; then it tells them how their vote has helped to change Britain for the better. That is laugh. Then it asks my Conservative party members:

"Do you want better hospitals with more beds and more nurses to care for the sick?"

We do, but we certainly will not get them from this rotten Labour Government.

Someone sent me a copy of *GP*. Labour was keen to quote from *GP* when it was in opposition, but now that the Secretary of State has the top job he dismisses it as a public relations job for the Conservative party. I have read the issue from top to bottom, and the headline reads:

"Chaos reigns on eve of reforms".

GP had conducted an important survey, which found that 71 per cent. of GPs did not support the reforms, 83 per cent. said that they were "not prepared" for them, 70 per cent. felt that they were not part of a group, 93 per cent. were "worried about GMS funds" and 64 per cent. of fundholders were "suffering financially".

In an article in the same magazine, a doctor said that the health service reforms could prove an Armageddon for general practitioners; and, in its comment section, the magazine said:

"Since the much-heralded announcement of the so-called new NHS almost two years ago, in true new Labour fashion there has been more rhetoric than action. Guidance has invariably been late and has been drip-fed to the profession, often missing details on the most vital of ingredients—funding."

As we all know, any Labour MP who was honest would get to his feet and say that the Labour party has not delivered on the promise that it gave us on 1 May 1997: it is not funding the national health service properly.

The article continued:

"Even as the magical hour for lift-off approached this week, and primary care groups went onto health authority payrolls, some had yet to appoint board members"—

certain of my hon. Friends have mentioned that—

"and vital decisions were still being delayed by the lack of central guidance.

Many Gps have put an immense amount of effort into these reforms, often despite opposing them in principle".

I thought that the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin) talked a lot of sense. I have received a letter; I shall not reveal who it is from, but it refers to undemocratic nurse elections for primary care groups in south Essex. The writer—not a constituent of mine, but someone in Essex—says:

"The election process was hijacked so that the nurses were not allowed to nominate or vote for their own candidates. Only Authority backed nominees surfaced from a 'Selection Board'. The local doctors, on the other hand, fellow professionals, ran their own elections with no interference from anybody, and their candidates were accepted. Their process was simple and basic: the nurses had theirs manipulated . . . this process was abused in South Essex, where nurses found themselves railroaded into accepting candidates in the following manner: All community nurses were invited to meetings jointly organised by the Health Authority and Thameside Community Trust. Here nurses were told quite categorically that a caseload would be a qualifying fundamental requirement and thus avoid management stooges."

The writer told me that, in the event, management stooges were appointed.

This is a dreadful Bill. It is all about imposing a command and control system on our health service. It gives unprecedented powers to the Secretary of State to interfere in every aspect of the running of our health service, right down to the drugs that a family doctor is able to prescribe. As we have heard, the Bill will abolish the popular, successful system of voluntary GP fundholding. I think it is disgraceful that no Labour Member has stood up and asked what will happen to the patients of GP fundholders. Do they not deserve care as good as the care that they received under the system of GP fundholding? The Bill is not about raising standards; it is about levelling down. It is a socialist measure.

The establishment of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, PRODIGY and the cash-limited drugs budget will put pressure on family doctors to restrict effective treatment on the ground of cost alone.

When Labour was in opposition, it was fond of quoting all the lobbyists. I have had umpteen letters from the BMA, the Royal College of Midwives, the NHS Confederation, the Royal College of Nursing, the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists and the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, but, conveniently, not one Labour Member has quoted from the letters. We know why. They have nothing good to say about the Bill.

I did not notice the BMA applauding the Conservative Government, but it says:

"The Bill heralds yet more structural change for doctors after nearly a decade of major upheavals in the National Health Service. The BMA will work with Government to try to make these changes work but would ask for no more changes for some time after this. We need a period of stability now in which doctors can concentrate on quality of service to patients rather than structural reorganisation."

However, the BMA gave the game away: it is down to money. It says:

"It is the responsibility of the Secretary of State to allocate funding for the proposals contained in the legislation, but there will need to be a considerable increase in funding to achieve all the proposals in the Bill, particularly the huge agenda envisaged by CHImp"—

what a ridiculous title. It goes on:

"Without a significant increase in overall NHS funding, it is inevitable that other parts of the service will see a drop in funding if all these functions are to be carried out. The implementation of the Health Bill cannot be cost neutral."

A worried constituent has written to me on behalf of chiropodists. The Royal College of Midwives is anxious that the present system of regulation of midwifery will be

"wholly replaced through secondary legislation. Whilst the Royal College of Midwives supports the replacement of the United Kingdom Central Committee with a new structure, it is most concerned that the Government have not sufficiently clarified the parameters of the successor professional body."

The Bill may be a great triumph for socialism, but it is a very sad day for the national health service.

8.37 pm

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in what is an important debate.

As a practising GP who continues with a small number of surgeries, I am now a member of a primary care group, so I register that as an interest. For many years, several changes have been imposed on us by the NHS. We have heard much rhetoric about the pros and cons of various aspects of the Bill, but—

Mr. Hammond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Stoate: No, I cannot give way. I have only 10 minutes.

As someone who is a practising GP and who therefore sees those changes day to day, I am in a better position than many to comment on them. Conservative Members

[Dr. Stoate]

have waxed lyrical about the benefits and wonderfulness of fundholding, but I tell a different story; it is a personal story, seen at first hand.

We have learned much from the fundholding experience. I would not wish to leave hon. Members with the impression that fundholding has not done a significant amount of good, because it has. We have to be fair: fundholding has taught us a lot. It showed us a lot about management structures and how GPs and others can develop services in their communities, but it has also created enormous problems. It goes completely against the aims and values that Labour Members share.

We have heard that 60 per cent. of GPs are fundholders. That is true, but I can speak from personal experience and for the many hundreds of GPs whom I know personally. Many of those 60 per cent. went into it not voluntarily or with evangelical zeal, but because they had to. They were forced to by all sorts of chicanery and underhand methods. They felt that they had no choice—go into fundholding, or forget about the new member of staff, the development of the practice, the new computer system. Computers were frequently tied to fundholding: no fundholding, no new computer. Pressure was put on my colleagues in an unhappy and underhand fashion.

No Labour Government could accept the two-tier service that was created and the inequalities that were caused by fundholding. It is to the credit to my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Health that fundholding has now been ended.

Of course fundholding produced excellence. It was bound to. The cards were loaded so much in its favour that it had to produce excellence, but every time a patient was seen more quickly by a fundholding GP and referred to a consultant, a patient of a non-fundholding GP was pushed down the queue. Every time a patient was seen by a consultant from an outpatient clinic in a surgery, it meant that another patient could not be seen because the consultant was in the doctor's surgery, not in the hospital clinic to see people who would otherwise have been seen from the waiting list.

Of course, therefore, fundholding produced good things and seemed to be wonderful, but it did so at the expense of so many other people who were not achieving that type of service.

It is ludicrous to say that we could have made every GP a fundholder. Once there was no longer an inequality and a two-tiered service, there would no longer be a benefit in fundholding, and the whole system would fall down like a pack of cards.

The new NHS will be fairer, distribute resources more equitably and eliminate two-tierism. It will be needs-led, it will integrate health and social services and reinstate strategic planning, and it will emphasise quality and reduce inequality.

Earlier in the debate, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) talked about the dispossessed. I listened very carefully to what she had to say and even tried to intervene on her. I ask her, on her proposals for introducing money from the private sector, which insurance company would take on someone with multiple sclerosis, chronic diabetes or infertility? We would get nowhere by asking the private sector to take on those people.

Miss Widdecombe *rose—*

Dr. Stoate: I shall give way, as an act of generosity to the right hon. Lady.

Miss Widdecombe: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way.

Again, there is the confusion that the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) showed. Trying to get money in from the private sector is not only about people going and insuring themselves, but about setting up partnerships with the private sector, so that we can benefit from private sector technology, expertise and staffing—as in, for example, St. Peter's hospital in Chertsey, where there is a joint unit, which both partners use and for which the private sector has contributed a huge amount of money. It is a matter of getting additional resources into the NHS, not only of getting people to insure themselves in the private sector.

Dr. Stoate: Unfortunately, the private sector will follow that type of policy only if it can make a profit for itself, which is its fundamental motive. The private sector will provide a service, but only if people pay for it through private insurance, or if the NHS puts public money into the private sector—which gets us no further, as we will be back to exactly where we started.

In Dartford, the HealthCare Partnership primary care group has piloted primary care groups. It is already one year ahead of many other such groups, as it was a pilot for the National Health Service (Primary Care) Act 1997 and thus has one year's more experience than most. It has already expressed an interest in moving on to primary care trust status. The group has been successful in developing primary care services, cutting bureaucracy and gaining control over how local resources are best used for local patients.

To scotch the idea that fundholding was somehow a good thing and non-fundholding a bad thing, that group in my constituency of Dartford consisted of fundholders and non-fundholders who voluntary came together to pool their resources and expertise, because they realised that the two-tier service created by fundholding was not in patients' interests. When working together as a primary care group pilot, they were able to demonstrate improvements in bureaucratic costs and in services, and genuinely to make a difference to people in Dartford.

The experience of people in Dartford, and the improved care being offered to them, will act as a template for primary care groups across the country, as they begin to catch up with my primary care group—which, as I said, is one year ahead.

One of the Bill's purposes is to allow the formation of primary care trusts, which will be freestanding organisations either commissioning care—at level 3—or commissioning and providing community services at level 4.

Yesterday, I spoke to Dr. Alasdair Thompson, the chairman of Dartford's primary care group. As I said, the group was started as a pilot under the 1997 Act and is one

year ahead in the process. The group has been able to find solutions to many of the challenges and has had much more time to consider its future.

Dr. Thompson gave three main reasons why he believes that it is so important that the Bill's provisions enabling trust status should be passed. The first is that there are limitations in the current process. Although primary care groups have freedom in their budgets, trusts will have much further flexibility in purchasing, in providing community services and in joint working with social services.

Secondly, primary care trusts will be able to develop strategic plans for delivering community health services, based on an integrated approach that is agreed by their work force and signed off by their board. The emphasis on developing community services that are closer to the patient's own environment will make a big differences to local services. The community infrastructure that will be needed to support the new hospital in Dartford—which is the first being built under the private finance initiative scheme—may be developed and managed by the primary care trust. In turn, that will lead to increased professional motivation and better clinical practice.

Thirdly, as freestanding bodies, trusts will have far greater freedoms, within their accountability arrangements, in their use of the unified budget—which is likely to include personal medical services schemes, local development contracts and single-handed vacancies—so that there is scope to develop innovative solutions for future work force problems, as described in the primary care investment plan.

Ultimately, of course, the Secretary of State will approve applications to become primary care trusts. I am looking forward to the day when he will be able to approve the trust application from my own group. It will be up to local health authorities to ensure that the process of application for trust status is wide ranging, and includes as much local opinion as possible. I hope that the Minister will be able to assure GPs that progression to trust status will occur only when a clear majority of local GPs are interested in it.

My understanding is that the Bill will not affect GPs' independent contractor status; I would welcome reassurance from the Minister that that is the case. The House will be aware that independent contractor status has been a great strength of British general practice over the years, and has delivered exceptional value for money and excellent quality primary care. British general practice still represents excellent value for money, and quality envied throughout the world.

GPs now form the majority on primary care group boards, but when primary care trusts are set up, with the increased responsibilities and wider range of skills needed, Ministers may think that no longer appropriate. The current proposals are for lay members to form the majority of PCT boards. GPs and nurses, however, can still form the majority on the PCT executives, which will report to the boards.

Dr. Thompson has asked me to seek reassurance from Ministers that the primary care trust executives, which will largely comprise the doctors and nurses who deliver the services and whose livelihoods will depend on decisions made by the board, will have a clear say in the decisions made by the boards.

Primary care trusts will have the freedom, within their accountability arrangements, to allocate resources, develop service arrangements, negotiate incentives and generate income.

The Bill marks the beginning of the process, not the end. It will clear the way for new ways of innovative thinking about how best to deliver top quality primary care for the next century. In my constituency there is already a clear commitment to the process, and I shall finish by quoting from a discussion paper written by my local primary care group as part of its expression of interest in trust status:

"The Partnership has taken the view that the philosophy underpinning the establishment of PCGs builds on our partnerships approach to developing health care and to community involvement, which started with joint commissioning with West Kent Health Authority, and continued via the Locality Commissioning group pilot. There is now a greater opportunity for the partnership, as a Primary Care Trust, to further develop our partnerships working as both commissioners and providers of community based services."

That was written not by a group of GPs who are disillusioned and dissatisfied, or sorry about the changes that we are making, but by a group that is ahead of the field and has clearly, and voluntarily, shown its commitment first to primary care groups and now to primary care trusts. Fundholders and non-fundholders are working together for the good of the community, and involving nurses, social services and others.

What could be a better template for what the Government propose than what is happening in my constituency? The programme is one of success, and the Bill will achieve what we set out to achieve. I commend it to the House.

8.47 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I want to draw together two strands from the opening speeches. The Secretary of State made passing reference to the fact that the Government were embarking on an NHS-wide standard-setting exercise focused specifically on the needs of the elderly and the treatment of old people within the health service, and the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) spoke on the theme of rationing. The right hon. Lady, as we would expect, made her point in a polemical way, but it would help the debate if we treated the idea of rationing not in a polemical or a pejorative way, but as a simple factual statement of what happens when there is a gap between supply and demand.

Rationing can be done well or badly, fairly or unfairly, and on the basis either of clinical judgments or of arbitrary bureaucratic judgments. I shall pursue that issue, especially in relation to the treatment of the elderly, and the way in which the Government-inspired exercise that the Secretary of State mentioned might work. Clearly, the question is about more than how rationing works. There is a resource issue, too. The gap between supply and demand will vary depending on the resources available, which is why the Liberal Democrats consistently draw attention to the under-resourcing of the system.

Some Labour Members seemed wholly blind to that problem. The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), who has now left the Chamber, presented himself as an expert on cancer treatment. I am sure that he is, but he seemed wholly unaware that British funding of cancer services is seriously deficient in relation to that

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

of comparable western countries. That deficiency is reflected in the fact that key chemotherapy drugs are not available to British women in the same way that they are to women overseas.

There is a resources issue, but there is also a deeper question about how rationing is carried out. I shall focus specifically on how it is applied to older patients in the NHS. In principle, care is allocated on a wholly idealistic basis. The codes of conduct of the professions make it clear that clinicians should not discriminate on the ground of age or on any other basis. However, there is a growing concern among elderly people and the organisations that represent them that age is becoming a basis for rationing, often quite explicitly. To some extent, elderly people are bound to feel the adverse effects of the shortage of resources in the NHS because they use it more frequently than others—40 per cent. of the users of the NHS are retired people. However, there is growing concrete evidence of age being used as a rationing criterion.

I gave several examples of that when I introduced a ten-minute Bill some months ago, and it is worth repeating some of them because they are highly relevant to the debate. Rehabilitation programmes for people who have had strokes do not involve a great deal of resources, but a lot of research shows that many health districts and trusts use a specific age cut-off to limit the availability of the service.

Another more understandable example is kidney dialysis. The treatment is very costly and it is widely known that elderly people have great difficulty in getting on to the programmes, although all the medical evidence that I have seen suggests that they are just as likely to benefit as younger patients.

Cancer screening also arouses strong feelings. Active efforts are made to ensure that younger women are screened, but less effort is made for older women, even though the evidence suggests that they benefit just as much from early detection. That is a specific, and probably rather absent-minded example, of age-based rationing.

Drug rationing is at the heart of much of the debate. My final example relates to the drugs available for people suffering from senile dementia. There is controversy about the benefits of some of the new drugs becoming available and clinical trials are continuing, but the balance of evidence that I have seen suggests that if the drugs were widely available they would considerably reduce the damage, inconvenience and great humiliation that people suffer as a result of Alzheimer's. The drugs are severely rationed and there are enormous disparities between different areas.

The process should be more open. I hope that the Government will address the problem. I should like to hear more about what the Secretary of State meant when he said that the Government were embarking on a process of standard setting, experiment and research into the treatment of elderly people in the NHS. Part of the problem is that not enough research has been done.

Several organisations representing elderly people, as well as professional organisations including physiotherapists, have said that it would be helpful if there were a clause in primary legislation that specifically prohibited discrimination or rationing—if we are to use the word—on the ground of age. Decisions should be based purely on professional clinical judgment and the quality of life that could be achieved.

8.53 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I welcome the duty of co-operation that will be placed on health authorities and others. The Labour Government are already making a difference in my constituency on that issue. Health trusts and my local social services have made it clear to me that the encouragement that they have been given since the election to get together and work in the interests of local people has made a difference to the services that they provide. I have been pleased to see the good work that is being done locally. I also very much welcome the abolition of fundholding, which not only created a two-tier service, but was incredibly expensive to administer. It is outrageous for the NHS to spend so much money on administering the scheme.

The Conservatives have claimed that GPs became fundholders by choice. I saw the performance objectives of regional health service managers when GPs were being encouraged to take up fundholding. Those objectives, presumably from the Department of Health, clearly stated that the proportion of fundholders in the area had to be increased.

That was a funny way of creating a simple, open and rational choice for all GPs. If one really wanted a fair choice for GPs, one would not give preferential grants to one group—GPs were told that if they became fundholders they would get extra money for computers—and one would not tell health authority managers that they must increase the number of fundholders in their area.

The Labour Government's approach, creating primary care groups instead, strikes me as far more sensible and rational. To reduce the number of commissioning groups from 3,000 to about 500 is obviously a way of reducing bureaucracy, yet ensuring that a much wider group of people in each area can have an influence on the health care that is provided. I congratulate the Government on not limiting the system to GPs. Community nurses and other lay members can have an influence, and that is much better than the narrow focus instituted by the Tories in the fundholding scheme.

I welcome the Bill's emphasis on quality of care and the introduction of the Commission for Health Improvement, but I seek clarification on several points. Users, carers and patient groups want to be sure that their views will be included in discussions on their local health services in the new NHS. I agree with that aim, but will it be best achieved by creating a legal duty or by providing guidance and spreading best practice?

Under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, there is a legal duty to consult various people, but that has given rise to some bureaucratic exercises in which a glossy 200-page brochure has been sent to every single voluntary organisation in an area, many of which simply do not know what to do with it and certainly do not have the time to examine it in any detail. That is not necessarily the best way of achieving real consultation. We must find out what works and ensure that the views of users, carers and patient groups are properly taken into account.

I seek clarification about the membership of primary care groups and trusts. The NHS is much more than doctors and nurses, and one of its great strengths is

teamwork, with the input of all the different professions, giving the best patient care to everyone. It is important, if all the needs of all the different areas of the country are to be met, that the membership of the groups and trusts should not be set in stone, but should be able to change and be fluid over time.

Physiotherapists, pharmacists, health visitors, occupational therapists and midwives all have much to add and can greatly influence and improve primary care services. I am not asking for guaranteed places for members of each of those professions, as what works in one place or time may not work so well in another, but we need fluidity to get the best out of primary care.

I seek clarification on the duty of trusts to be responsible for the quality of care that they provide. For me, quality of care is not about producing glossy documents to match the glossy annual accounts that many trusts now produce; it is about listening seriously to patients and users views on the services provided by their local trust and about seriously challenging the results of clinical audit in every single trust.

I hope that the responsibility for providing quality of care will be extended in time to all aspects of the NHS and to the private sector, but I am not convinced that now is the right time to put the details of that implementation into law. It is the right time for the Government to make a commitment to ensure quality of care across the board, whether by the NHS or by the private sector.

Other hon. Members have said that regulation of quality of care should be applied in the same way to the private sector as the Bill would apply it to the public sector. The Health Committee is considering this issue at the moment and I still have an open mind as to the best way forward. There are attractions in having the same body to regulate both the public and the private sector, and some people have suggested that CHIMP should be the organisation that reviews all health facilities. However, significant difficulties would need to be overcome. First, part of the private sector is already monitored by a separate body, and it is proposed that it will be monitored by regional commissions for care standards. Secondly, the private sector does not work in the same way as the NHS. In the private sector, a lead consultant will book a session in a theatre and does not work in a team with junior doctors. That alone suggests that the arrangements should be separate. Thirdly, many patients go to the private sector because they want something different. We would need to think about those issues carefully before we apply the same rules to both sectors.

The last point on which I seek clarification concerns the Government's excellent commitment to getting more women on to the boards of trusts and other public bodies. The aim is for women to make up 50 per cent. of trust board members and 40 per cent. of chairs. I would like to see those figures be even higher over time. However, we could start to change some of the language to try to encourage women to join in. The Bill and its schedules mention chairmen, but we should start talking about chairs. That usage is important, as the Department of Health recognises. When it talks about its aims for appointing women, it talks about chairs, but everywhere else it talks about chairmen. I hope that we can amend the Bill to put that point right, because it is important, especially as most of the staff managed by the boards are women.

With those concerns expressed, I wish to register my support for the Bill. It will start a great shift in the NHS's culture, so that staff can co-operate in the interests of patients, and where the quality of service—which is what is important to patients—is seen as important in itself. It shows that the NHS is not just about placing a duty on trusts to cover their financial responsibilities, but about something much more. It will take time to change the culture, but both staff and patients want that change. They do not want the Tories internal market, which treated the NHS like a game of Monopoly. Patients want an NHS in which teams work together to provide what counts—quality patient care.

9.3 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) mentioned a problem with the terminology of chairmen and chairs. I have spent most of my adult working life selling chairs, and that is where they should remain.

The Bill gives effect to the legislative requirements laid out in the Government's three health White Papers. The Government are presenting it as the centrepiece of an ambitious health reform programme. Ministers have heralded it as offering a radical future for the NHS, promising to improve the quality of health care across the country, eradicating unfairness and reducing bureaucracy. Rather than fulfilling the Government's ambitious rhetoric for the NHS, the Bill will make the health service more inflexible and inefficient, reduce choice and, regrettably, centralise decision making.

I shall concentrate my remarks on the issue of fundholding and the new primary care groups. As we have heard repeatedly this evening, it was the previous Government who introduced GP fundholding. It has been a focus of particular hostility from the Labour party since its introduction in 1990. Fundholding offered doctors greater financial and clinical autonomy, while allowing improvements in patient care. It enabled efficiency savings to be reinvested in the system, resulting in shorter waiting times and the development of new specialist services. Even the Government have come round to acknowledging that. Their White Paper stated that the introduction of fundholding had enabled doctors to

"sharpen the responsiveness of hospital services and extend the range of services available in their own surgeries".

As we have heard this evening, fundholding received the support of many groups, including the British Medical Association and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. GP fundholding encompassed 60 per cent. of NHS patients. Sadly, the Government have now killed off fundholding despite acknowledging its success, and in the face of widespread support.

The Bill proposes instead to create primary care groups and primary care trusts, leading to the biggest change in the family doctor service since the creation of the NHS. That is despite the promise of the Prime Minister before the election that there would be no great upheavals in the service. The Bill will coerce GPs into the new primary groups whether or not they want to join them. There is the question of the costs associated with these new structures. Initial estimates vary from £150 million per year to more than £300 million per year, without accounting for the new structures start-up costs—at a time when the

[Mr. John Randall]

Government want to save money on bureaucracy and have budgeted for savings. Under fundholding, any extra administrative costs were more than offset by efficiency savings. The new system will be more costly and less efficient.

The Office of Health Economics has predicted that the organisational costs of delivering health care are likely to increase. The Institute of Child Health stated that the cost of developing three to five-year health improvement programmes will more than offset even the most generous assessment of savings made by cutting the number of commissioning bodies. With that background, it is difficult to work out how the Government can claim that their reforms will make substantial savings that will be directed to front-line patient care.

The BMA found that fundholding encouraged accountability and that GPs were truly willing to share the decision-making process. The Audit Commission said that fundholders introduced more services to patients, improved communications with hospitals and were more cost effective in their drug prescribing. The main criticism of fundholding was that it was a two-tier service, but the Government propose to introduce a four-tier service. If two tiers were bad, how can four be good?

The Government's answer to GP fundholding is to have a compulsory system whereby between 50 and 100 GPs are forced into the same group. Under the old arrangements, patients were usually able to choose the fundholding GP, but under the primary care group system, patients will be assigned to a primary care group on the basis of where they live. That contradicts one of the central points of criticism that the Labour Opposition used to make about the operation of the NHS internal market.

The primary care groups became active on 1 April this year and replace the voluntary nature of fundholding with a compulsory approach. GPs will remain able to commission services from hospitals for their patients, but will not be able to act individually as in fundholding. The White Paper stated that PCGs should develop around natural communities, but the boundaries have been fixed by the Department of Health and GPs have consequently been coerced into a designated geographical area. A BMA poll published on 4 February showed that 55 per cent. of GPs would not be willing to take an active role in their local primary care group. It bodes ill for the future of primary care group management if GPs prove to be unwilling to sacrifice time to serve on their boards.

In addition to the lack of enthusiasm for the new PCGs among GPs, the fact that groups, rather than individual fundholders, will make service agreements with trusts means that individual practices will lose the flexibility that previously existed. The Government's hostility to individual practices retaining their autonomy could lead to a loss of the specialist services that many fundholders have developed for their patients.

Under the new resource allocation formula, there will be little incentive for practices to make savings because the bulk of efficiency gains will be made by the whole PCG, not the individual practice. The inefficient will be carried by the group, with the result that the entire group will suffer financially. The direct incentives, which existed under fundholding, to be as efficient and effective as possible will simply disappear.

The abolition of GP fundholding will not lead only to financial inefficiencies—according to the BMA, it will lead to substantial regional variations in care depending on where a patient lives. Under fundholding, patients were almost always able to choose a fundholding GP if they believed that they would therefore receive a better service. Under PCGs, that will no longer be possible.

PCGs and PCTs will reduce the freedom of individual doctors to run their own affairs. They are compulsory bodies, and GPs must join them. They will control contracts, and prescribing budgets for individual GPs will be at the mercy of collective decisions. Flexibility will be reduced, with GPs unable to switch patients from one hospital to another without protracted negotiation. That will add pressure to waiting lists and waiting times. There will no longer be the same drive to improve hospital services.

The Bill will result in a far less efficient, more centralised system of health care. It will reverse the shift in the balance of power from the health bureaucracy to the GP that fundholding made possible. It is a very bad Bill, and I shall oppose it.

9.12 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I have waited a long time to stand here tonight, both during the years that I spent in the health service dying to have a Government who really cared about the NHS, and during this evening's interesting debate. I have waited for change not only as a nurse, but as a patient.

As a nurse, I found it abhorrent to have to tick forms saying that some people had the advantage of being GP fundholder patients for whom there would be extra care and would be able to rise up the waiting list. I deplored that practice deeply, and I did not want to have to do it.

As a patient, I have the common nurse's complaint of varicose veins, and have waited for two years for treatment. When I rang the hospital to ask what my chances were of being treated soon, I was told that there had been a huge mistake and that, because I came from a GP fundholding practice, I should have been treated a year earlier. When faced with that sort of thing, I realise how important it is to be here today.

I was interested to hear a former Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), say that the only way in which to judge who held the balance of power in the health service was by seeing who sent Christmas cards to whom. The concept that we might hold each other in mutual respect—that we might want to send Christmas cards to each other because we value the contribution that each of our colleagues makes to the health service—is completely alien to the Conservatives. They are unable even to contemplate it, but the Bill does so, valuing equally the contributions of everyone in the health service and ensuring that we can all work together.

Goodness knows that difficult decisions must be made to balance the needs of the community against the desire to ensure that we have the best service and to ensure the clinical excellence of services provided. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Commission for Health Improvement are our best opportunity to ensure that we work together.

The duty of co-operation excites me because of my local government background. Was it not local authorities that made sure that we had clean water and that people

lived in decent housing? Now, after all the wasted years not being consulted by those involved in health services, they are back next door to their colleagues in the health service, making sure that they are able to contribute to the improvement of the health of all our people. That is the flavour of the Bill.

The Bill is designed to create a new confidence in the NHS, a confidence that we are beginning to build with the staff. We now talk to NHS staff. There was a huge consultation process involving nurses, who were asked what they thought. I have here a fax from just one nurse in my constituency who said, "I want to contribute and write five pages to Frank Dobson about the way that we should move forward." It is crucial that we listen to those people who are committed to the service.

Staff are the health service's greatest asset. As a former nurse who was pleased about the recognition that nurses have just received—a recognition not only of their contribution to the service but in terms of their pay packets—I cannot forget other members of staff who work in the service. I could not have done my job without the people in the laboratories who helped me to get the results of blood tests as quickly as possible so that we could do our work on the wards. We must think about those people now.

It was bad enough when I had to collect a particularly disgusting specimen—I am sorry; I am a nurse, and I always get down to this sort of talk—but I would often think of the poor person who had to open and test it the next day. Some of those people could be earning just £8,000 a year, so I hope that some can be included in a pay review, just as nurses have been. Nurses are very pleased with their recognition, but we cannot forget some of the other NHS staff.

The Bill is about confidence, about how we recognise the value of NHS staff and about how we communicate and work with them. That is why there should be a duty to communicate with the voluntary sector as well as all the other people involved. They understand what is going on, and this is our best opportunity.

I greatly welcome the new regulatory systems and the new systems of self-regulation of many professions allied to nursing. Some are incredibly invasive—for example, chiropody involves many sharp instruments and even anaesthetics. Many are not registered or regulated, and I want them all brought into a regulatory system.

It is 20 years this month since I joined the Labour party. I joined because I wanted a Labour Government to do what this Labour Government are doing. I am extremely proud that this new Labour Government have the guts to deal with the issues that we think they should, bringing the NHS back to the people and ensuring that the staff work together, instead of fighting among themselves. We want people to be able to say that we have an NHS of which we can be extremely proud.

9.19 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I do not share the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) for the Bill one jot, and nor do doctors in my constituency. Instead, I share the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess).

The Bill exemplifies everything that new Labour stands for. Like others before it, it sounds like a major advance, an improvement and a benefit to our people. It is not. In fact—*[Interruption.]* Gullible Labour Members are actually cheering me. The Bill is rather like the Budget. The Budget sounded great at the time, but a few weeks of analysis has exposed gaping holes both in Labour's arithmetic and in the benefits that it was purported to provide.

The Secretary of State was full of rhetoric. To the gullible on the Government Benches, may I make one thing very clear? The Bill does nothing to abolish the internal market that the Minister so deprecates. It cannot, because even this Government recognise the improvements in patient care that the market has introduced. Instead, there is tinkering with the system, which will reduce, not improve, patient care.

At a stroke, 60 per cent. of all patients—the patients who were cared for by GP fundholders, which includes all patients in my constituency, I might add—in this nation will see a reduction in standards of care. The remaining 40 per cent. will not see an improvement either. Changes to the way in which GPs will be funded will put paid to that.

I have news for the Labour Members who have loyally read their party brief. This Bill will go the same way as the Budget: it looks good, but, when one has had a chance to analyse it and see what has not been trumpeted, it is very bad news. It is particularly bad news in Lichfield and Burntwood, where all GPs have been fundholders.

This is nothing to do with levelling up; it is all about levelling down. This is about the Government not being able to resist poking their collective nose into things about which they know nothing: patient care. Fundholding empowered GPs; this little piece of collectivisation puts power back into the hands of Big Brother who, in this instance, does not know best.

I shall air six areas which concern me most. I do not expect the Minister to answer here and now the various points that I shall put to him, but I ask him to make a note of them. I should be grateful if he would write to me on them because they have been raised with me by doctors who know about patient care.

Although all GPs in Lichfield and Burntwood are fundholders, that is not so nationally. Unlike the proposals before us, GP fundholding was voluntary. Have the Government ever asked themselves why some GPs did not want to become fundholders? It was often because they did not want to become involved in practice management. Not every doctor has the skill required, regardless of whether a practice manager is appointed. Now, as my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) pointed out, all doctors will have to join a primary care group—whether they like it or not, but the financial resources are just not there to provide adequate practice management under the proposed scheme.

My constituency is typical. Executive support is quoted to be about £3 a patient, which is far too low for the work required. Even worse, such support does not amount to £3 because it is not ring-fenced. Many primary care groups have not received anything like that level of funding.

The primary care group that covers Lichfield and other towns too has to share a chief officer with another PCG. According to the PCG newsletter published in my area, which was received on 8 April, he is the only permanent member of staff. Furthermore, it is becoming clear that

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

Lichfield practices are sharing other posts, including that of deputy chief officer and a PCG accountant. That level of staffing is wholly inadequate.

Secondly, the situation that I have just described may seriously disadvantage Lichfield and Burntwood, as the other PCG is Tamworth, which has a new hospital, but needs to secure further funding from the PCG. Executive underfunding may lead to Tamworth being favoured by the executive, thus disadvantaging the Lichfield and Burntwood. I do not expect the Minister to answer the following specific constituency question now, but will he assure me that Lichfield Victoria hospital and the Hammerwich hospital will not close as a direct consequence of this Bill and PCGs?

Thirdly, like so much other legislation before the House, there is not enough detail in the Bill. Too many decisions can be made by the Secretary of State, and there is no real information about funding.

Fourthly, the majority of GPs are prepared to assist in fair rationalisation of resources; but, if the system is to be fair, all patients and all doctors should start with a level playing field. I am sure that the Minister and the whole House would agree with that. But—and it is a big but—*[Interruption.]* It is all very well Labour Members laughing because they have read their Labour party brief, but have they spoken to GPs in their constituencies? Have they actually spoken to fundholders? Have they got off their bottoms and gone back to their constituencies and found out what is really happening on the ground? I think not, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The most important aspect in Lichfield and Burntwood will be the handling of any overspend by the South Staffordshire health authority for the financial year just ended. My near neighbour, the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright), raised that point. If the health authority—any health authority—is overspent as at 31 March this year, will that money be sliced off PCG funding for the year 1999–2000?

That is very important because it is not just Lichfield and Tamworth and the South Staffordshire health authority that have an overspend. I notice that the House has now gone very quiet, because hon. Members had not thought of that. If the money were sliced off PCG funding, it would unfairly penalise GP practices—*[Laughter.]* If hon. Members have thought about it and are finding it so funny, what will they tell GPs in their constituencies? Slicing off the money would unfairly penalise GP practices that are spending within their budget under fundholding. Will the Minister please write to me on that point? Would an overspend of the health authority take money away from the PCGs?

South Staffordshire health authority has ended the year approximately £7 million overspent, as the hon. Member for Cannock Chase said. It is now clear that PCGs will almost certainly not start with a level playing field, as that situation will be carried forward to PCG budgets.

Fifthly, handling all the changes to date has taken an enormous amount of GP time. Do the Government recognise that? Do they understand that the work has not been recognised by proper funding of locum costs while GPs are away from their practices, milling through the paperwork that the change has generated? How do the Government intend to compensate for that? At the moment, no compensation plan is available.

Finally, improving the quality of GP services to the community is part of a doctor's philosophy, so many have no problem with the proposals for clinical governance, the Commission for Health Improvement or the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. Both are fine in theory.

Unfortunately, the resources for those initiatives are not forthcoming. It has now been confirmed that South Staffordshire health authority and other health authorities will provide no financial resources for clinical governance, and the only conclusion to be drawn from that is that the aim of most GPs to provide the highest standards of care is not supported by the health authorities—or the Government, who have not funded it properly.

The recurring theme is that the major changes proposed for the NHS will not be supported by special funding. Reliance on NHS staff dedication to continue giving more than they are paid for must come to an end eventually. So many facets of the latest reforms are not funded, despite headline increases of the NHS budget, and staff will become alienated as, once again, they are expected to provide even more for nothing. If the Government truly support their NHS reforms, why is the funding to allow professionals to deliver their vision not available?

A Lichfield doctor wrote to me last night by e-mail—and, just to show my dedication, I tell the House that I received it in my office at 12 minutes past 10 last night. He wrote:

"I am fully prepared to follow NICE advice but for it not to be funded or balanced by telling me which"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am afraid we shall never know.

9.29 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): The debate has been distinguished by the participation, from the Opposition Benches, of no fewer than three former Secretaries of State for Health and one former Health Minister. In addition, we have had the benefit of a considered and reasoned debate in the other place, and I hope that the Government will yet take the opportunity to show that they can listen to experience and that they will respond.

I am grateful in particular to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) for pointing out that the Bill will not abolish the internal market despite the Government's rhetoric; to my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) for introducing me to the "Christmas card flow" method of calculating relative power within the NHS—perhaps he predicts that, next year, the Secretary of State will be overwhelmed with Christmas cards—and to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) for drawing the House's attention to the fact that the Secretary of State has already succeeded in creating an oppressive climate of fear in the NHS. I am grateful also to my hon. Friends the Members for Orpington (Mr. Horam) and for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) for emphasising, respectively, the importance of the evolutionary, the naturally Conservative, approach to our health service and the meaninglessness and vacuousness of the so-called duty of partnership, which in any event already exists in national health service legislation.

I am sorry to say that, with one or two minor exceptions, I have heard nothing from Labour Members showing any original thought. I can only voice my concern for the one or two Labour Members who expressed themselves excited by the Bill. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) for asking the Minister whether the Government will now accept the Lords amendment requiring the majority of general practitioners in a primary care group to consent before that group evolves into a primary care trust. I look forward to the Minister's answer.

Anyone who listened to the Labour party's pre-election rhetoric, anyone who has heard the extravagant language of the Government's health policy announcements and their re-announcements, and anyone who has been taken in by the creative accounting of the comprehensive spending review, will be asking himself why the NHS is delivering a worse standard of service than it was two years ago. Anyone considering the huge challenges facing our health care delivery system must be struck by the complete inadequacy of the Bill—apparently it is the flagship measure of the Government's health agenda—to meet those challenges.

It is a mean little Bill, driven in equal measure by political spite, the instinctive desire to centralise and the Government's need to put in place by stealth a mechanism to ration NHS care and to shift the responsibility for that rationing away from the Government and on to the shoulders of the medical profession.

The Bill says nothing about the real challenge facing the NHS, which is that of matching supply with demand in the face of dramatic medical advances and huge demographic changes. It says nothing also about the need to develop a broader resource base for health care provision to bring Britain into line with the levels of spending, the quality of provision and the range of choice that are available to the citizens of its European neighbours. The Bill does not mention the issue of rationing or the mechanisms that will be needed for an on-going, open and transparent determination of the limits of availability within our NHS.

The Bill does nothing that will address the deteriorating service that is facing patients. Similarly, it will do nothing for the extra 200,000 patients who are waiting to see a consultant, such as Mr. Tony Wiese, whom I met yesterday in his home at Woodbridge, Suffolk. Mr. Wiese cares passionately about the NHS as a relatively young multiple sclerosis sufferer in the secondary progressive stage of the disease.

Mr. Wiese recently asked his GP to prescribe him a drug that he had been prescribed in 1994 but had abandoned because of side effects. Now that the disease has advanced, quite reasonably Mr. Wiese wants to try it again. His GP told him that he would need an out-patient consultation at his local hospital and she referred him accordingly. On 26 March, Mr. Wiese received the following letter from Ipswich hospital NHS trust:

"Dear Mr. Wiese, an appointment has been made for you to attend Dr. Wroe's neurology clinic on Monday 25th September 2000 at 2.30 pm."

Mr. Wiese will have to wait 18 months just to see a consultant to obtain a prescription for a drug that has already been prescribed for him once before. That is an 18-month wait for someone suffering from a progressive degenerative disease. Is that the sort of service that the Minister expects to deliver in his modern and dependable new NHS? It is that sort of quality of service issue that the Government should be addressing in this Bill. The Minister might want to think about the specific example that I have quoted as he prepares himself for MS awareness week, next week.

Do not let me give the impression that the Bill does not have a central coherent theme, because it certainly does. However, it is one that is hidden from view. It is stealthily concealed by language and presentation, like the Chancellor's tax rises. It puts in place the mechanisms of a sophisticated but unacknowledged rationing system. Primary care trusts, with their limited range of referral options and the inclusion of prescribing budgets within the cash-limited envelope, will be in the front line of that rationing mechanism. They will operate within guidance issued by NICE based not only on clinical effectiveness, but on cost-effectiveness of drugs and treatments.

The chairman of NICE has already made it clear that he may have to recommend that a drug or a treatment be not made available because of resource shortages. CHIMP will be able to intervene, question clinical practice, demand information and challenge doctors' decisions, but it does not end there. The Bill as introduced in the other place gave powers to the Government to control the medical profession in an unprecedented way, so that they could effectively end self-regulation if they chose.

Thanks only to the vigilance of my noble Friends, that threat has been somewhat diluted, but the loss of choice in referrals, the ominous cloud cast by PCTs over the independent contractor status of GPs and the pincer movement of cash limits on prescribing budgets and NICE guidance enforced by CHIMP will spell the end of the traditional role of the GP as an advocate for his patient. With it will be lost any proxy for the informed consumer in our health care system.

It goes on. The unprecedented powers that the Government are giving themselves to control prices of pharmaceutical products by law can—and, I predict, will—be used by them to force companies not to make available in the United Kingdom drugs that the Government do not want to be available.

So, underlying the provisions of the Bill is a plan for the creation of a comprehensive mechanism for controlling demand and limiting supply of NHS health care by limiting the power and freedom of doctors; removing the choice enjoyed not only by patients of fundholders, but by all patients; controlling what drugs are available in the UK market; and increasing the Secretary of State's ability to direct the health service centrally—all that while denying the existence of rationing.

The Bill does not even begin to address the real and crucial problem of resourcing, which underlies all the other problems faced by the system. So how did the Government get themselves into this corner—centralising in the name of local autonomy, cutting services in the name of levelling up and imposing massive, expensive and unnecessary change on a health service to which, in 1996, the Prime Minister pledged that there would be "no great upheavals" under Labour? They are pinned there by three unwise political commitments, the first of which is the hostile position that they adopted in opposition, on the basis of dogma rather than reason, to the principle of the internal market and, in particular, to GP fundholding.

[Mr. Philip Hammond]

The second unwise commitment is the Government's ill-advised pre-election pledge to cut waiting lists by 100,000—regardless of the cost to patient care in the NHS as a whole and regardless of the distortion of clinical priorities that that entailed. The third—which has been raised to the status of a political creed in itself by frequent, if increasingly unconvincing, repetition by Ministers—is the denial that rationing exists in the NHS.

Thus have the Government inevitably committed themselves to an agenda of centralising control, distorting clinical priorities, reducing choice, creating the mechanisms of organised rationing without ever acknowledging it and dismantling GP fundholding—the foundation on which a truly modern health service could have been built. Indeed, the abolition of GP fundholding—the single most important of the changes proposed in the Bill—ranks with the end of tax relief on private health insurance premiums for the over-60s as an act of pure political spite—an exercise in dogma.

Fundholding worked. Most GPs recognised that, the Audit Commission and the OECD have said so and even the Labour party's own expert advisers recommended that it should not abolish the fundholding system. Fundholding practices have been effective in securing for their patients improvements in secondary provision and delivery of a wider range of high quality primary health care services. They were responsive to the needs of their patients and they would have been quite capable of delivering the Government's health care agenda. Their abolition is purely politically motivated.

Dragooning GPs, independent contractors, into enforced co-operatives, where 50 or 100 of them have to work together, is a recipe for disaster. To remove the practice as the basic unit of the system is to go against the grain of human nature. It will reduce doctors' individual freedom to act on behalf of their patients, reduce the range of services that they can offer and reduce their incentives to improve their efficiency and to demand efficiency from the hospitals serving them.

Of course fundholding was not perfect. The NHS is a large and complex organisation and change takes time to be effective. Fundholding was still in a relatively early stage of its development—Conservative Members would be the first to recognise that—but it offered a basis on which to build. The major objection to it, that it led to inequality between the patients of fundholding and non-fundholding practices, could easily have been addressed by a genuine levelling up—a universalisation of fundholding to ensure that all patients enjoyed those benefits, rather than the levelling down, which is Labour's basic instinct.

On 18 January, the Secretary of State said:

"primary care groups provide incentives for all concerned to 'level up' to the standards of the best."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1999; Vol. 323, c. 594.]

Since then, I and my hon. and noble Friends have sought assurances from the Government that none of the 60 per cent. of patients who had fundholding GPs would lose access to services as a result of the transition from fundholding to PCGs. We have had no answer, and we could not have an answer because those services are already being lost—psychiatric services in Stafford and Leicester, physiotherapy in Luton and Hertfordshire, diabetes and asthma clinics in north London and counselling in Bath, to name but a few.

Therefore, for 60 per cent. of patients, the bottom line is already clear. The Government's reforms have produced an immediate reduction in primary care services. I am still waiting for an explanation of how, even within the apparently elastic confines of new Labourspeak, a reduction in services can be described as levelling up. Instead of seeking to build upon and improve those parts of the primary care system that were demonstrably delivering, and encouraging those that were not to emulate them, the Government chose to sweep them away, replacing them with a structure that looks backwards for its inspiration, not forwards.

One thing that we can be sure about with the Government is that, the more extravagant the claims, the more flamboyant the language, the further from the claims the reality is likely to be. So it is with the reform of primary health care. We are told that primary care is being modernised, that local accountability is being strengthened, but an old-fashioned centrally directed structure is being reimposed. We are told that it is being done in the interests of equality. If that is so, it is the equality of the Soviet era—a levelling down to equal misery for all. The end result is a commissioning system that is less, not more, responsive to patient needs.

In the three hours or so since my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) outlined the Opposition's objections to the Bill, we have heard from Labour Members not a rebuttal of those objections, not a reasoned response to her concerns, but a recital of the Labour party's official dogma. I say this to Labour Members: if the NHS is to be a success in its second 50 years, they must resist the temptation to love it to death. We all share the desire for improved health care delivery. Conservative Members do not believe that the Bill remotely begins to address the issues that must be faced if that is to be achieved.

Of course we object to the way in which the Bill substitutes political control for professional independence, bureaucratic direction for market forces and compulsion for choice, but much more fundamental is the Government's continued refusal to address the resource issue or even to acknowledge that it exists. A Government who genuinely put health at the top of their agenda would be using their flagship health legislation to address that issue, to look forward to the resourcing of our health care system into the 21st century, and, by that test, the Government have failed miserably.

The Bill attacks GPs' traditional role. It attacks all clinicians' traditional professional freedom. It eliminates choice for patients. The end result, whatever the Government's rhetoric, is a highly prescriptive system reversing the trend under the previous Government of devolving power and reverting to the discredited principle that "Whitehall knows best". Behind the rhetoric, the Bill is a recipe for inflexibility, inefficiency, lack of choice and increased bureaucracy. I urge the House to vote for the amendment and deny the Bill a Second Reading.

9.45 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) launched

a fierce attack in an attempt to divert attention from our success in reducing the numbers on waiting lists. She produced what in some parts of the trade are known as killer facts.

The *Official Report* will confirm that she told the House that Southampton general's waiting lists have trebled since the election. I can tell the right hon. Lady that the Southampton University Hospitals NHS trust waiting list is now more than 1,000 below the level of March 1997.

The right hon. Lady's second killer fact was the accusation that the chief executive of Salisbury health care NHS trust—I have an interest because I live in Southampton and it is just up the road from me—had written a letter to consultants telling them to stop putting patients on the waiting list. The letter gave three options, and the right hon. Lady mentioned two of them. She said that one option was to reduce the numbers on the list. She did not tell us that the chief executive had said that that risked inconveniencing patients and GPs, that it could expose patients to clinical risk and that it would merely pass the problem on to next year. The other option she mentioned was to use the private sector. That happens in some parts of the country if NHS capacity is full. However, she did not mention the third option, which was to increase NHS capacity, and that is what the Salisbury health care NHS trust did. It treated an extra 500 patients during February and March alone.

The right hon. Lady's speech can be judged on those facts. It was either misleading or just plain wrong. Fortunately, many of the other speeches had considerably greater weight. My hon. Friends the Members for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) spoke about the importance of the Government's quality agenda. My hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) talked of the importance of close co-operation between the national health service and social services. They will have noted the important partnership proposals for co-operation, which will enable those two bodies to pool resources and powers.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) set out clearly the problems of attempting to apply our proposals for raising quality in the national health service to the independent sector as though the two were exactly the same. My hon. Friends the Members for Dartford (Dr. Stoate), for Bedford (Mr. Hall), for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell), for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) and for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) spoke in different ways about the problems that arose from fundholding and the improvements that they envisaged would come from our proposals on primary care. A number of hon. Members spoke of the optimism and achievements of their own primary care groups.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin) talked about the importance of partnership, and I assure him that health improvement programmes will be published with full details of whom and how they have consulted on the drawing up of those proposals.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) raised a number of important points. I can tell him that an interim regulatory impact assessment of our pharmaceutical proposals has been produced and is in the Library. A further stage in that process will take place when an agreement has been reached.

The right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) raised, among other things, some local PFI issues, and I shall look into those matters for her. The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) spoke of the achievements of his local hospitals in reducing waiting lists, and I acknowledge his contribution to the debate. We also heard from a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) and for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), who expressed scepticism about our proposals, although without a great deal of evidence to back up their arguments. I hope to respond to other hon. Members during my speech.

We must remember that when the Opposition were in government, they fostered division and competition in the health service instead of co-operation and collaboration. They failed to establish a framework to ensure that the NHS delivered consistently high-quality services to patients, wherever they lived. Instead of setting out plans to tackle inequalities in health, they hid the information that revealed that such inequalities existed. It was astonishing to hear talk about the "dispossessed" tonight.

When we were elected, we set about tackling the problems. The Bill is a vital part of our modernisation programme, although it is only a part. It introduces the legislative changes that are needed to carry through reforms that are already under way. With the support of general practitioners, nurses and other health professionals, we have already established 481 primary care groups, and the largest hospital building programme in the history of the NHS is in progress. We have also invested a further £2 billion in the NHS, which will receive an extra £21 billion announced in the comprehensive spending review, which will flow over the next three years. Under existing legislation, we have established the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. NHS Direct already covers 40 per cent. of the country, and an extra 2,500 nurses are already in training.

Throughout those changes, we have worked—as we promised we would—with the NHS, with its users, with carers, with professional bodies and with others. They have helped to shape what we have done, and the way in which we have done it. That is why our reforms have been so widely welcomed—why they are seen so clearly as working with the grain of what the NHS, the staff who deliver the service and the public who rely on it want. Their views have shaped the Bill.

Not everything that we want to do can be done under existing legislation. In key areas—in primary care, in quality, including self-regulation, in partnership, in pharmaceuticals and in the tackling of fraud, the Bill provides a legal framework to complete the modernisation of the NHS on which we have already embarked. That framework will put doctors and nurses in primary care at the heart of the new national health service, with the power and influence to shape and deliver the services that their patients need. It will make possible a new, systematic approach to identify, implement and assure best practice and high clinical standards, and will ensure that each part of the NHS works in partnership with every other part, with local authorities, with voluntary organisations and with local communities to deliver effective services, tackle inequalities in health and improve the health of the public.

[Mr. John Denham]

The framework will enable us to tackle fraud in the NHS effectively, saving millions of pounds that can be used to treat patients. It will enable us to secure the best deal for patients, the NHS and the pharmaceutical industry from the billions of pounds that the NHS spends on drugs each year.

As for primary care, fundholding is coming to an end, and with that will come an end to the bureaucratic, costly system that fragmented the delivery of services—a system that gave advantages to some patients, but only at the expense of others. The Opposition claim that fundholding was popular; but after years of persuasion and years of generous management allowances, only 50 per cent. of family doctors ever signed up, and many of those did so with real reluctance. Today, only 46 fundholding practices out of 3,400 in England have hung on to fundholding, while 481 primary care groups are up and running.

Primary care groups will bring real benefits to patients. Better services will be available to all people, regardless of who their GPs are or where they happen to live. The transfer of responsibility that we are bringing about is real. I am told that, at the high point, £6 billion of NHS funding had been transferred to the influence of fundholding practices. Already in the current financial year, £11 billion of NHS funding has been transferred to the responsibility of primary care groups, 83 per cent. of which are operating at level two, doing their commissioning directly. That is a real transfer of resources, enabling practitioners in primary care to shape health services in their local areas in the interests of their patients.

Let me deal with the allegations about bureaucracy. We have heard talk of £150 million. That is the amount that it cost to provide the management of fundholding practices; we are using the same amount to provide primary groups that will cover all practices and all patients, right across the country.

After we were elected, we looked at the books and saw that the Conservative party had planned to increase spending on the bureaucracy of fundholding by a further £30 million. We stopped that. We spent £20 million on cancer services and £5 million on children's intensive care services. I believe that patients agree that that was a better way in which to spend that money.

Under our system, doctors will have greater flexibility of referral. There will be an end to the internal market system of extra-contractual referrals, which denied patients and clinicians choice. GPs, nurses and other health professionals will shape health services to the benefit of all patients.

Throughout the country, as we have urged, primary care groups are protecting services that are delivered cost-effectively at practice level, and levelling them up. Three primary care groups in Calderdale, Kirklees have worked together to develop an out-of-hours service in partnership with NHS Direct. In north Cumbria, extending single practice-based vasectomy and ophthalmology services to other practices—*[Interruption.]* From a sedentary position, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) decries those improvements in services. He does it because he has spent all evening claiming that they would not happen, yet, throughout the country, new services are being developed and existing services that were previously available only to fundholding patients are being made available to all patients. Of course he will heckle: he does not like the early signs of success that are already developing with our reforms.

Mr. Duncan: Two weeks.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman is right; it is only the first two weeks. There is much more to come.

Dr. Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Denham: No. I have no time.

Some primary care groups—perhaps, in time, many—will want to use the powers in the Bill to go further: to establish primary care trusts that are responsible for almost all the commissioning of health services and, if the case is right, to deliver some community health services as well. Primary care trusts will enjoy new powers and freedoms: powers to invest in general practice, in premises and in information systems; to devise their own incentive arrangements, so that there are incentives to develop individual practices as well as the work of the trust itself; to employ staff to support practices in delivering health care; to use the flexibility that is offered by the National Health Service (Primary Care) Act 1997; to develop clinical governance; to continue professional development; and, at the highest level, to provide community health services, not just to commission them. Those are just some of the powers that primary care trusts will be able to develop locally—at a pace that helps to meet local needs, after widespread consultation.

Primary care groups and trusts will help to cut bureaucracy. They will help to ensure that, over the lifetime of the current Parliament, £1 billion that would have been spent on bureaucracy will be spent on patient care, as the number of commissioning bodies is cut from more than 4,000 to fewer than 650 throughout Great Britain.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald raised again the tradition during the whole 50 years of the NHS of saying, "The NHS is finished. It cannot cope." She said that that situation had existed from the beginning of the NHS. That is true: there have always been those who have decried the national health system. Fortunately, they have not been listened to and they will not be listened to today. If they had been listened to, the NHS would have been destroyed.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 127, Noes 368.

Division No. 141] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally

Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Clive Betts.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 333, Noes 134.

Division No. 142] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*

Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain

Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mates, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mr. Adrian Sanders.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

HEALTH BILL [*LORDS*] *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Health Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(i) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown under the Act,

(ii) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment,

(b) the conversion into public dividend capital of any amount outstanding by way of initial loan forming part of an NHS trust's originating capital debt.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

Question agreed to.

HEALTH BILL [*LORDS*] *[WAYS AND MEANS]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Health Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the imposition of charges in respect of expenditure incurred by the Commission for Health Improvement.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

Question agreed to.

Prescriptions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

10.26 pm

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I do not know whether it is a good or a bad thing that the Adjournment immediately follows the Second Reading of the Health Bill. My hon. Friend the Minister has had to work doubly hard tonight, but at least he has not had to break up two evenings. As I was in Committee this evening, I was unable to listen to the Second Reading; I hope not to cover the same ground but if I do so, I apologise to the House.

The national health service drugs bill is rising; in my opinion, it is rising inexorably, but, also in my opinion, that is not a bad thing. Drugs can be extremely cost effective. A drug that keeps someone out of hospital can make a saving for the NHS. A medicine that gets someone back to work quickly can have a beneficial effect on the economy. New drugs are becoming more efficient all the time and are starting to deal with conditions that we were previously unable to treat. The pharmaceutical industry is a big contributor to the national economy and is an industry that we should be trying to support. My purpose tonight is try to convince my hon. Friend—if he needed to be convinced—of those matters and to suggest some ways in which we could try to think about meeting the rising drugs bill that we shall face in coming years.

The Government have already made a huge start: an extra £19 billion will be available for the NHS in the next three years. That money will help to modernise the service. It will make more services available, and some of it will go towards meeting the cost of the rising drugs budget. However, in my view, it will be insufficient.

In recent weeks we have engaged in debates on this subject; we have increasingly heard the Conservatives start to answer some of the questions that perhaps they did not fully address during their 18 years in government. Unfortunately, the answers that they have given to those questions tend to be right-wing ones that advocate more private practice and more private medicine. I do not believe that those answers are in line with the principles of the NHS. The Liberal Democrats have also acknowledged the rising drugs bill, but yet again they seem to think that their magic penny on income tax will address all the problems.

I am loth to suggest that what I offer tonight is a third way, because the boss—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—has already copyrighted that particular phrase. I will, however, offer a basis for debate that is in line with the principles of the NHS and that will help us to address the issues.

My constituency includes Pfizer, a large and successful pharmaceutical company that employs 3,500 people there. When its current building programme is complete, it will employ 1,000 more. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I are working hard to encourage the company to make further investments, and we are hopeful that it will do so. However, the company, like other pharmaceutical firms, is beginning to feel underappreciated.

Some reasons for that have been inherited by the Labour Government, including the limited prescribing list and the problems of parallel importing that still have not been fully dealt with. Equally, however, Pfizer feels underappreciated because it is difficult to see effects such as the outcome generated by a medicine taken into consideration when pricing is considered. The company also fears that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence will focus on driving down the drugs bill rather than on outcomes and cost effectiveness.

The industry is also worried about changes in the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, although it has been reassured by recent statements that the new agreement would be introduced after full discussion and, as far as possible, on a voluntary basis.

I reject some of the fears that have been expressed, but I must recognise that those fears exist, and, as a constituency Member, I must reflect them fairly. Of even more concern, however, are the needs of individual constituents such as Mrs. Noreen Heffer of Ramsgate and Ms Lesley Jordan of Sandwich, who have been diagnosed as suffering from multiple sclerosis and who would benefit from beta interferon treatment, which they currently cannot receive.

The reason for that is complex. As best as I can piece the story together, there was an accord in east Kent on who could appropriately receive the drug and who could not. The accord broke down, and too many people were put on the treatment, for some of whom it was not suitable. Once the health authority recognised that there was a problem, consultants got together to agree new prescribing guidelines and to start to review the cases of people on beta interferon. While the list is being reviewed, and while people for whom the treatment is not appropriate are weaned off it, Mrs. Heffer and Ms Jordan have to wait.

The health authority has increased its budget to £325,000, which is large for an authority of its size. Although I can give my two constituents a good explanation for what has happened, all they want to hear is that beta interferon is available so that they can begin their treatment. How can we make such treatments available?

We must remember that if expensive drugs are made available, there will be an impact on drugs budgets.

Another constituent's wife was diagnosed as suitable for Aricept treatment at a time when it was not available in my constituency. By the time it became available, her condition had deteriorated to the point at which the treatment was no longer appropriate. An opportunity was missed for that patient.

Many constituents have also come to me because they have erectile dysfunction and wish to receive Viagra, which they cannot receive under current guidelines. They are concerned that they will not receive it either if the preliminary guidelines on which the Government are consulting remain unchanged.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I thank the hon. Gentleman for letting me intervene on his thoughtful and remarkably independent-minded speech. Does he agree that the Government's proposal on Viagra, which has just been out to consultation, is a rather irrational way to go about rationing a drug? The proposal would restrict the drug's prescription on the basis of the causes of dysfunction rather than the likely benefit, meaning that many people, particularly older people, simply will not have access to it because the Government

[Dr. Evan Harris]

are choosing to limit it. It is welcome that the Government are taking responsibility for rationing, but that is an irrational way to do it.

Dr. Ladyman: I largely agree with the hon. Gentleman; I have concerns about the rationality of the drug's availability being limited by the cause of the underlying condition. But even on that basis the principle behind the guidelines appears to be that erectile dysfunction has an underlying psychological cause, whereas it is now clear that there is usually an organic condition behind it—for example, diabetes, hypertension, post myocardial infarction, arteriosclerosis, stroke, renal disease, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, pelvic injury, prostate resection, radical prostatectomy and pelvic radiotherapy are all major causes of erectile dysfunction.

Erectile dysfunction is an extremely distressing condition, and I think that men who suffer from it are entitled to have the entirety of their condition treated. If one is treating renal disease, surely one should also treat the conditions that renal disease causes, which might include impotence. The prescribing guidelines should reflect that.

In fairness, I should state that Viagra is a Pfizer drug, so that is another constituency concern. I should also point out to the Minister that Pfizer has estimated that Viagra would cost only about £50 million if it were freely available on the NHS. That is far less than some of the figures that were put about a year ago when the debate first took off. Viagra is actually quite a cost-effective treatment. It would cost only about £19 a month under the current pricing guidelines, which is far less than the monthly cost of an antacid treatment.

If the Minister feels that he needs to limit the availability of Viagra in case the bill gets out of control, I suggest that he challenges Pfizer to cap the cost of Viagra at £50 million; if more than £50 million worth is required, he should suggest that Pfizer should provide it for free. I think that Pfizer might enter negotiations on that basis. The Minister might be pleasantly surprised—he should at least have a go. If he does not think that he has the power to do so, today's Second Reading of the Health Bill revealed that clauses 30 and 31 give him the power, even if he does not have it at the moment.

Finally on behalf of my constituents, I have a further concern that men's health issues are generally downgraded and not given the consideration that they should be. With Lord Jopling, I recently helped to host a meeting in the Houses of Parliament with Senator Bob Dole. I do not share Senator Dole's political philosophy, but he has been campaigning in America for increased prostate cancer treatment and screening. We should be taking up that issue in this country, but I accept that if we did, it would also greatly increase the drugs budget.

I am asking the Minister for fair treatment for pharmaceutical companies, for novel treatments such as Viagra and Aricept to become freely available, and for expensive drugs like beta interferon to become freely available. All these will increase the pressure on the drugs bill. Although the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is a very good start and will clearly consider cost-effectiveness, it alone will not hold back the flood waters of increased drug prices.

Therefore the Minister might care to give some thought to my following suggestions. He could switch as many drugs as possible to over-the-counter availability. If he then changed the way in which pharmacists were remunerated to encourage them to have private rooms where they could advise customers on over-the-counter drugs, and if the Government and pharmacists together raised awareness of the benefits of home health care, many of the treatments that currently have to be prescribed by GPs could be sold over the counter. That would also keep people out of GPs' surgeries, thus reducing another burden on the NHS.

The Minister should change the way in which drugs are priced to reflect outcomes, and do so in such a way that the saving made by a medicine keeping somebody out of a hospital bed is reflected in the drugs budget. The drugs budget can then be allocated the resources needed to exploit to the full the potential of medicines.

Even those things would not be sufficient for the increase in the drugs bill for which we must gear ourselves up. So, I shall make one further slightly more radical suggestion for the Minister to consider. Currently, the NHS prescription bill—based on an answer that his predecessor, my hon Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), gave me in April last year—is £4.5 billion a year, of which we raise only £300 million through prescription charges. We can either fund the increased drugs budget through the money made available under the comprehensive spending review or in some way increase prescription charges—the money which comes directly from the patients. That is where the Minister should be looking.

The Government have said in the debate on Viagra that the principle behind the NHS is that it should make freely available treatments for life-threatening, painful or disabling conditions. I agree; drugs for such treatment should be freely available to everybody irrespective of income. But, those represent only half of the current drugs budget. The other half need not necessarily be freely available to everybody. Drugs that deal with trivial conditions and conditions which get better on their own should be charged at the market rate to everybody, also irrespective of income.

In the middle, there is a group of drugs which deal with serious conditions—I would include Viagra in that category—and should be freely available only to people who are on low incomes. Others should pay for them at the market rate. By doing that, we would create a market in such drugs; competition might force the price down. We would also generate private medical insurance schemes to help people who want to take such an option. Such an approach would be true to the principle of the NHS that life-threatening and disabling illnesses would be freely treated and that pain relief would be freely available to all.

In case the Minister doubts whether there is room in the budget for such an approach, I shall give him a few examples of drugs in the middle category. Dermatological products cost £246 million, non-serious use of anti-ulcerants costs £300 million, anti-diarrhoeals cost £67 million, laxatives £71 million, tropical non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs £35 million, drugs for hay fever £34 million, contraceptive pills—slightly more controversial in such a category—£58 million, hormone

replacement therapy £138 million, oral nutrition drugs £85 million, food for special diets £29 million and vitamins £12 million.

That is a list of £1,075 million-worth of drugs that do not deal with life-threatening, disabling or painful conditions. If the NHS were not paying for just a fraction of, say, non-serious use of anti-ulcerants, my constituents could get their beta interferon and Aricept. Those drugs should be freely available to people who need them.

Does the Minister agree that the drugs bill will inevitably rise over the next few years? How will he stem or meet that rise? Will he consider my suggestions? When will the Viagra consultation process be reported on? Will he give thought to increasing the availability of drugs over the counter and through home health care measures? If he will give those suggestions some serious consideration, this debate will have been well worth while.

10.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on his success in securing the debate. I understand the importance of the topic to his constituents, many of whom are employed by Pfizer, which is of course the manufacturer of Viagra, among many other important products. That drug has produced more comment and opinion than perhaps any new drug in living memory. I shall return to it in a moment.

As a Government, we do fully accept the importance of the United Kingdom pharmaceutical industry to this country. Only last week, at the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry annual dinner, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State described the industry as "quite brilliant". The Government unequivocally support the industry.

The Department of Health is responsible within Government for policy in relation to NHS purchase and the use of pharmaceuticals, and for policies designed to create the right competitive environment in which the UK pharmaceutical industry can continue to flourish and compete in the global market. Those two aims are not at odds. We recognise that the industry's present success was hard won. In the face of globalisation and increased competition, the industry must be at the forefront of innovation and competitiveness if that success is to be sustained. Nothing that we are doing threatens that success—rather the opposite.

The principal objective of recent developments, such as the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, is to enable faster and more equitable access to innovation, and to ensure that resources are used cost-effectively. Clinicians encounter more and more new products—the pace of change is quickening. The setting up of NICE recognises the need for machinery to provide authoritative guidance, and the industry has expressed support for the broad objectives of NICE. The Association of British Pharmaceutical Industry and the Association of the British Health Care Industry will be represented on the partners' council, which will oversee NICE's work programme and ensure fair play in its working methods.

We have made it clear that if medicines are shown to be more clinically and cost effective than other treatments, that is how the money should be spent. Unified budgets will facilitate that. There is no cap on the drugs budget. The introduction of unified budgets creates a single funding stream for three components of expenditure—hospital and community health services, prescribing, and GP practice infrastructure—which were previously managed separately, under differing rules, by different parts of the NHS.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: In fairness to my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet, I think I should try to answer as many of his points as possible.

Those three components have been combined into a single pot at health authority and primary care group level. That level will depend on the clinical priorities that health authorities and primary care groups set themselves. Unified budgets will create a flexible environment, which will help to ensure that patients get the most appropriate treatment for their condition.

It is not true to say that the Government are unwilling to allow for the full cost of treatment when assessing the price of medicines. Under the NICE appraisal system, companies will be free to submit any relevant data with the core of NICE's appraisal focusing on the health benefits achievable from NHS budgets—including hospital beds and staff, not just the cost of drugs.

We continue to work closely with industry. For example, the industry strategy group, which includes senior industry representatives and Department of Health, Department of Trade and Industry and Treasury officials, meets every quarter to discuss a range of issues. The industry has praised Government for their handling of the debate on the development of the single market in pharmaceuticals during our presidency last year, and subsequently the ISG and other bilateral contacts provide forums for discussion of NHS policies as they affect the pharmaceutical industry and other relevant Government policies. One of these is the parallel import of pharmaceuticals into the UK. Government has an on-going and constructive dialogue with the industry on that issue. Internationally, the ISG is seen as a unique forum for Government-industry debate.

As a discerning home customer, the Government are determined to secure value for money for the national health service. The clinically and cost effective use of pharmaceuticals helps to stimulate UK industrial competitiveness; it does not undermine it.

We do want to reach a voluntary agreement on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, but the Health Bill will enable us to back it by statute if necessary. Above all, the PPRS—voluntary or backed by statute—has, and will continue to have, the joint aims of fair prices for the NHS which represent good value for money, and fair prices or profits on NHS sales for the industry which represent a reasonable return on the enormous investment that goes into pharmaceutical research and development and of course helps to fund future R and D.

This remains a very good country in which to invest in pharmaceuticals: it has lower costs, labour flexibility, good industrial relations, a strong science and skills base, a strong cluster of existing industry, low corporation tax, political and social stability and an excellent regulatory regime.

I said that I would return to the topic of Viagra. Impotence is in itself not life-threatening and does not cause physical pain. It can, in exceptional circumstances,

[Mr. Denham]

cause psychological distress. Until the advent of Viagra, NHS expenditure on this condition has been limited because of the nature of the treatments available. Now that treatment is available in tablet form, the cost of treating impotence could escalate. To limit that impact, we propose controls that reflect the priority given to treatment for impotence and reflect current expenditure on it.

Briefly, it is proposed that Viagra and other drug treatments for impotence would be available on prescription from GPs for the following groups of men: those who have had radical pelvic surgery or their prostate removed; those suffering from spinal cord injury; diabetics; multiple sclerosis sufferers and those who have single gene neurological disease. Treatment would also be available for other men adjudged by a hospital specialist to be suffering from severe distress. General practitioners would be able to prescribe privately to impotent men not suffering from one of the named conditions.

The period of consultation ended on 25 March and work is now under way to collate the responses. That is likely to be a considerable task as there are about 850 of them. Even at this initial stage, it is clear that the widest possible range of views has been expressed to us. I should make it clear that no final decisions will be taken until we have had the opportunity to consider the range of responses sent in. We will carefully consider all comments that have been received during the consultation period before reaching a final decision. We shall also keep the issue under review once final policies are in place. We have to find a sensible balance between treating men with a distressing condition and protecting the resources of the NHS to deal with other patients with, for example, cancer, heart disease and mental health problems.

All health authorities were issued in 1995 with guidance that covered the use of beta interferon for the treatment of multiple sclerosis. It recommended that prescribing should be initiated by hospital specialists where clinically appropriate. The costs of prescribing are expected to be met within health authority allocations, taking account of local priorities.

However, we should be clear that there are continuing questions about the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of beta interferon, the benefits achieved, which patients will benefit and for how long, and how the benefits compare with those of supporting patients through, for example, specialist nursing care. Health authorities and clinicians rightly take these and other factors into account when they set local priorities.

We must ensure that clinical and cost-effective treatments are spread through the NHS as quickly as possible, and that is one of the roles of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which will provide clear and authoritative advice on key treatments and procedures. Subject to the outcome of consultation on the discussion document and appraisal by NICE, we are minded to refer beta interferon to the institute.

I should like to take the opportunity to address some of the other specific issues and suggestions that have been raised and made by my hon. Friend. My hon. Friend suggests that we should switch as many drugs from prescription only to over-the-counter status as can be accommodated safely. The Government encourage wider availability of medicines as soon as there is adequate evidence of safety in use. We have tried and effective mechanisms for processing such switches; indeed, they have formed the model for European-wide switching.

My hon. Friend suggests that greater emphasis should be given to the benefits of home health care. The Government are already doing a great deal to promote self-care. Most significantly, we have set up NHS Direct, the 24-hour nurse-led helpline, which has been a big success, with the first three pilot projects achieving a 97 per cent. satisfaction rating. NHS Direct is helping patients to make better use of the NHS. Many of the callers change their course of behaviour as a result of their calls.

Drawing on the experience of NHS Direct, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced today plans for extending its role in a number of new areas of activity. Among these is the development of NHS Direct as a health promotional tool, and NHS Direct nurses in west Yorkshire are planning to phone people to remind them of their hospital appointments.

We will also be piloting arrangements under which nurses will be able to call older people who come out of hospital to check that they are all right, or work will be done with family health service teams to help to improve the management of chronic diseases such as asthma and diabetes. NHS Direct will go on the internet as NHS Direct On-Line, so that the public can consult an interactive guide covering common minor ailments to help them decide when they can look after themselves and when they need to seek professional advice.

National health service direct information points may be placed in surgeries, libraries, pharmacies, post offices, supermarkets, accident and emergency departments and healthy living centres. They will be able to provide internet access to NHS Direct On-Line and phone access to a NHS Direct nurse and information on local health services. We shall publish a NHS Direct health guide to help people care for themselves. These are important developments.

My hon. Friend was right to refer to the role that pharmacists can play in encouraging the effective use of medicines. We are working on a strategy for community pharmacy that will take into account the expertise that pharmacists can bring to the use of medicines.

My hon. Friend made some radical suggestions about prescription charges, including the proposal that they should bring in about three times as much revenue as they do at present. In opposition, we promised to review prescription charges, and that we have done. The current prescription charge exemption arrangements were examined as part of the comprehensive spending review, which reported last year. We looked at a range of options for this Parliament, but concluded that the present charging arrangements should continue: all current prescription charge exemptions would be protected for the rest of this Parliament and existing patient charges would rise by no more than the rate of inflation over the next three years.

I am afraid that nothing my hon. Friend has said tonight has persuaded me that that conclusion was wrong.

There are systems such as my hon. Friend proposes in other parts of Europe. I should say that, where they apply, it is almost always the case that Viagra has been placed not in the intermediate category, as he proposes, but in the category of medicines for which patients have to meet the full cost themselves.

This has been an interesting debate and I am aware that, in the time available, I have not been able to respond—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at four minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 14 April 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BBC Parliamentary Coverage

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

9.33 am

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving us the opportunity to conduct this first Adjournment debate of the summer on the important issue of the BBC and its parliamentary coverage. The House has debated the subject several times in the past year; the debates have been good-humoured and reasonable. The House has left behind some hon. Members' old habits of Beeb-bashing, which was a good blood sport in the old days, but I believe that we all want to work together to ensure that the BBC fulfils its mandate and fully discharges its obligation, set out in its charter, to provide an adequate report of parliamentary proceedings.

We are conscious that it is not just the House that is in play; soon we shall have a Welsh Assembly and a Scottish Parliament, and there is a proposal for a Main Committee. The BBC will have to have regard to all the debates that take place in our different national forums, but I still maintain, as a strong supporter of the Government's constitutional programme, that what happens in this principal House, representing all the United Kingdom, remains paramount.

This morning, the BBC is holding a seminar on how to pay for itself—the usual chinwag between distinguished journalists. I received a nice note from the chairman of the governors, apologising for his absence from today's debate. The two Front-Bench spokespersons, my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting and the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), are present. I look forward to hearing what they have to say, but I hope that they will speak as Members of the House rather than as representatives of Government and Opposition.

What is the main concern that brings us to this morning's debate? It is, to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, that to lose one, or perhaps 1,000, listeners may be regarded as a misfortune, but to lose 3 million is unacceptable carelessness. That is what the BBC has done: it has lost 3 million listeners for parliamentary coverage.

I quote the BBC's figures, distributed in a document to some MPs before the Easter recess. Last year, "Yesterday in Parliament" had 3.13 million listeners; now it has 830,000. When "The Week in Westminster" was broadcast on Saturdays, it had 658,000 listeners. Now, in its graveyard slot of Thursday evening, it has 227,000 listeners. Taken together, that is a loss of 3 million listeners for parliamentary coverage on Radio 4.

Last year, when the subject was debated, we were solemnly told—in letters from the chairman and statements made by Mr. James Boyle on the radio and elsewhere—that people were bored with "Yesterday in Parliament", that they were not interested in parliamentary proceedings and that "Today" would gain plenty of new listeners between 8.30 and 9 o'clock as a result of taking Members of Parliament off the air. We now find that there has not been a single new listener to "Today". That is what we predicted. We now have proof. Today I ask the BBC to reverse last year's disastrous decision.

To be fair to the BBC, it has admitted that it got things wrong. In a letter that I received from the chairman, dated 9 April, he says:

"the BBC should be, and I believe is, big enough to put things right when mistakes have been made.

Two things are clear. The loss of listeners to 'Yesterday in Parliament' and 'The Week in Westminster' is much greater than we had expected—and that, whatever the causes of that loss, there is an unacceptable 'democratic deficit' which the BBC, with its special public service responsibilities, needs to address. The BBC must give appropriate prominence to coverage of parliamentary proceedings."

I welcome, as all of us do in our Lord's mansion, a sinner who is prepared to convert, and I hope that the chairman will put his words into practice. He also says:

"The Today"

programme

"figures, while steady, have not improved as a result of moving Yesterday in Parliament."

We also have an interesting statement from Mr. Tony Hall, head of BBC news, made at a Fabian seminar held in the House, now published by the Fabian Society—which, as a member of its executive committee, I advise all hon. Members to join. He says:

"we are all told—almost daily it seems—we live in a rapidly changing world. Some say audiences are no [illegible] interested in politics. Our research for our Programme Strategy Review showed something very different. People still expect, and want, the BBC to provide full coverage of difficult subjects. 65% said it was important that the BBC reported what was happening in Parliament."

I invite Mr. Tony Hall, as it were, to put his editorial decisions as chief executive of BBC news where his mouth was and restore "Yesterday in Parliament" to the "Today" programme as it is listened to by the majority of listeners in this country, and put "The Week in Westminster" back on Saturday morning.

The BBC will argue, as it has argued in the document that it circulated to some Members of Parliament, that it has extended parliamentary coverage, via the Parliamentary channel, the internet, the Sunday night programme "The Westminster Hour", and "Westminster Live" in the afternoons, but none of those programmes, good as they are, can replace a linked journalistic narrative of what is said in this place, broadcast on FM.

Tony Hall refers to

"a time and place where people can . . . listen".

It is no use shunting us into a slot late on Sunday night, or into an obscure corner of the digital network; what people need is a report of Parliament on their daily morning newspaper of the air, the "Today" programme. Radio 5 does an excellent job, but it does not report parliamentary proceedings. It will rush off to the Ministry of Defence for a press conference, but to my knowledge it has never presented a proper report of what happens here.

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

The "time and place where people can listen" is not on long wave. In a document sent to us before the recess, the BBC admits that one British person in five has no access to it. Last year, in correspondence, Sir Christopher Bland said that he was willing to come to my house to retune my radio at 8.30 am. Although that was an extraordinarily generous offer—my children asked whether this would take place before or after their Weetopops!—I did not want to burden Sir Christopher with such raw contact with a Member of Parliament and his family.

Driving up to Rotherham and wanting to hear a report of the important debate on Kosovo that we had just before the recess, I tried to retune my radio from FM to long wave, but it was impossible. There I was on the M1, being hounded by Eddie Stobart's and other lorries—lorries to left of me, lorries to right of me. Hon. Members know what the M1 is like in the mornings: lorry drivers rush to burn up their diesel fuel as fast as they can. Jabbing at my radio set trying to find long wave, I nearly caused a pile-up. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Whip, who is sitting on the Front Bench, thinks that a by-election in Rotherham would be a good or a bad thing; perhaps we can talk about that afterwards.

The situation is preposterous. As Mr. Hall says, our parliamentary proceedings should be broadcast at a time and place where people can listen. The purpose of this debate, however, is not just to make that fundamental demand, or simply to moan about the BBC; it is to defend the central role of parliamentary democracy.

It is currently fashionable to deride Parliament. I heard a woman journalist on Radio 4's "Any Questions" last Friday. I cannot remember her name, but in terms of flatulent, self-important pomposity she could knock any of us into a cocked hat. According to her, Parliament was not important, MPs were not important and nothing that happened in Parliament counted. Parliament has been written out of the national agenda. That, of course, is true for the fashionable intelligentsia—and some hon. Members play a political game by trying to present Parliament as the weak poodle of the Executive, although those of us who try desperately to stay on message but are always six months late know just how wrong they are. That is true even when we write, whatever language we happen to write in.

Parliament is central to democracy in this country. How we all wish that there had been one parliamentary debate for one hour in Belgrade to discuss the tragedy in that area. Parliament does hold the Executive to account. Of course it is not as exciting as it was earlier in the decade when there was no majority and Prime Ministers and Chancellors of the Exchequer were losing their jobs, but that is not the fault of Parliament or the Government. We must blame the British people, who in their wisdom decided to send a massive majority to the House of Commons two years ago.

In fact, since January there have been 35 ministerial statements in the House, and eight private notice questions. The Prime Minister has made four statements, and the Foreign Secretary seven. On nearly every day of the parliamentary week so far this year, a Minister—often the Prime Minister—has come to the House to justify, explain and account for his or her actions. Yesterday we engaged in an excellent exchange on Kosovo, and I understand that we shall have a full debate on it next week. However, none of those debates, statements, questions and probes has been heard in the mornings on our "national newspaper of the air".

Parliament is also the testing ground for the Executive of the future. Let us not rubbish it too much. In 20 or 30 years, when Opposition Members have their chance of regaining power, today's young men and women, some of whom are sitting on the Opposition Benches now—they will, of course, be a little greyer then—will be called on to become the nation's Executive, partly on the basis of the way in which they have performed here. We are not the United States: we do not take academics, bankers or journalists and put them in the Cabinet. It is from this place, for good or ill, that those who make the big decisions—such as how 40 per cent. of our gross domestic product is used—are chosen.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Should not newspaper editors and owners—as well as the BBC—bear in mind another factor, in addition to the issues that my hon. Friend has rightly raised? Without this place, whatever blemishes and faults it has displayed over the centuries, the civil liberties of all our people—including those whom I have mentioned—would not last five minutes.

Mr. MacShane: I think that my hon. Friend speaks for all of us.

Parliament has another important aspect: it reflects the kaleidoscope of what we are as a people. Many Back Benchers, some of whom are present on both sides of the Chamber—I shall not lessen their reputations by naming them—make a significant contribution. They are the ones who

"Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone,
Dare to have a purpose firm,
And dare to make it known."

As is well known, I am a team player—[HON. MEMBERS: "Which team?"]—but we need strong, independent Back-Bench voices. [*Laughter.*]

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman's passionate job application, but I want to pick up a serious point that he has made. I have been listening carefully, and I agree with much of what he is saying.

In trying to persuade the BBC to return "Yesterday in Parliament" to its rightful place, should we not bear it in mind that the BBC's charter requires it to cover Parliament properly? That is what makes the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, entirely different from other broadcasting organisations. It is not allowed simply to chase ratings—and in any event, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, it has failed in its desperate attempt to do so.

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

Parliament means more than just the Chamber, however. As a junior parliamentary private secretary at the Foreign Office, I can reveal a secret: the Select Committee system causes no little interest among Ministers. The Foreign Secretary has appeared more often

before the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs to answer questions than any of his predecessors. There is also the other place, where an interesting debate took place last night—reactionary and wrong, but interesting none the less. That too has been wiped off the airwaves.

Radio is important. There is a parliamentary television channel. I am going out live somewhere; it is possible to, as it were, chop me up, and it is difficult to make such an event come to life on television. This is a place for speaking. We are not really visual objects: we are losing our hair and gaining in girth. We are not pretty enough to appear on television, even those of us who have been treated with hormones or genetically modified. However, on radio we manage to tell a story, because radio is the medium of speech.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that originally "The Week in Westminster" was dedicated to the role of Back-Bench Members of Parliament, but that it has unfortunately changed, and now often carries what Front Benchers say?

Mr. MacShane: As a Back Bencher I find that deplorable, but I would be happy to take an intervention on the subject from the Front Bench.

We boast about having the best broadcasting system in the world. That may have been true once, but I wonder whether it is any longer. I watch political programmes in a number of other countries, and I often see a more mature, richer debate. The shop-worn Punch and Judy style of Messrs Paxman and Humphrys may be a barrier to understanding the new complexities of the modern world.

Unbelievably, we run a significant balance of trade deficit in broadcast programmes. This great nation of broadcasters imports far more than it exports. We do not have enough radio stations in the United Kingdom. We have 251. France has 858, Spain has 1,405, even the tiny Netherlands has 481, and Italy, where people obviously love talking, has more than 2,000. Three times as many people are employed in the radio business in Germany as in the UK, and twice as many in Italy. I want more broadcasting, more discussion of politics and more jobs to be created.

The row about parliamentary broadcasting, which has been rumbling for more than a year, masks a deeper malaise in the direction and management of the BBC. It is losing audiences, and many are asking whether it has lost its way. The licence fee is harder and harder to justify, certainly to many poor pensioners and the poorer members of my constituency.

The BBC was the first great nationalised industry in the long 20th-century British history of the belief that Government and Whitehall knew best what people wanted and what they should be given. As the BBC looks to the 21st century, I wonder whether it needs to reconsider its financing and institutional organisation.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): My hon. Friend is being slightly unkind to the BBC. The major reason for the BBC's loss of audiences is the rapidly changing technological world, which is changing the nature of broadcasting. That makes possible a Parliamentary channel, and means that we will get digital terrestrial television, satellite and cable. In the near future we will get digital radio, which will allow for debates in this place to be broadcast live on a continuous basis.

Mr. MacShane: I accept what my hon. Friend says, but he is arguing for quantity, whereas I am arguing for quality. My point was that the linked narration of "Yesterday in Parliament" makes the programme come to life, instead of its being a *Hansard* of television or radio that anyone can tune or plug into at any time of the day.

In conclusion, I appeal to the governors. They are responsible for the present position. It is clear that the BBC executives have shifted responsibility for this area to the governors. They do not usually intervene directly in programme making or editorial decisions, which is right. The executive of the BBC has let down the governors. It told the governors, and Sir Christopher came and told us, that removing Parliament from the airwaves on the FM "Today" programme would promote Radio 4, and that no one would notice the difference. They were wrong. Even Polly Toynbee, for example, who supported that decision before it was made, has written that she misses "Yesterday in Parliament." The executives were wrong 3 million times—the 3 million British citizens whom James Boyle, the Radio 4 controller, deprived of access to their own Parliament.

It is immensely hard for the British establishment to admit that it has got things wrong. It is harder still to put back in place what was successful. The BBC should be big enough to admit that it got something wrong, and to restore what worked and what serves the people of this country.

9.54 am

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I begin by declaring an interest, as the author of the "BBC Guide to Parliament." I should tell the House that any change in its circulation in recent years has nothing to do with what I shall argue today.

As is conventional, I congratulate the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on his good fortune in getting the debate. He knows that my congratulations are more heartfelt than usual. I shall try to be as non-partisan in my comments as he was; I agree with 95 per cent. of what he said. I shall pick up the issue of the licence fee, with which he ended.

We all accept the ramifications of the licence fee. It may surprise some of my colleagues that as a relatively right-wing, free-market Tory Member of Parliament, I am entirely in favour of the licence fee, precisely because of its public service implications. It requires the BBC to inform, educate and entertain, in that order of priority—a point rarely made by the BBC.

That requirement has increased, not decreased, in importance with the proliferation of channels. We must remember that when there is greater pressure on the BBC to defend its market share. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) alluded to that in his intervention. Audience share reduction is inevitable, whatever the BBC does. It must recognise that fact and understand that that is not an excuse to abandon its core values.

I ask the Minister to pass on my congratulations to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, who recently, in response to a question from the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon),

[Mr. David Davis]

my predecessor as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, stated his support for Alan Yentob's comment that quality comes before the mindless pursuit of audience. That matters in the present context, as elsewhere.

It is no bad thing that there is a dynamic tension between the wish to hang on to audience share and those core values. It prevents a subsidised monopoly organisation such as the BBC from making the Arts Council error of funding with taxpayers' money or, in this case, public service money, the very obscure—piles of bricks or preserved sheep—and invoking the public interest argument. Sensibly applied, dynamic tension prevents such a loss of common sense.

That dynamic tension also drives the BBC to try to square the circle by making good the popular and making the popular good. Over the years, the BBC has been extremely good at that. I come to my view of the BBC partly because, like the hon. Member for Rotherham, I have lived in another country. I have experienced the American television system and its lack of quality. I have seen the effect of the BBC not being present to drive standards up, as it has done in much of its coverage.

The idea of making the good popular and making the popular good demands from the BBC a creative response, rather than a managerial one, to its circulation problems. The error that we have witnessed over the past year results from a managerial response, rather than a creative response, to the problem of improving audience figures for the BBC.

Mr. Hawkins: As my right hon. Friend is speaking about managerial responses and excuses, will he comment on the fact that some of us who take an interest in BBC general and parliamentary broadcasting have been told that if "Yesterday in Parliament" is moved back to long wave, the programme will be shorter and fewer Back Benchers will be covered? Does my right hon. Friend agree that such a specious excuse and managerial response is nonsense, because if no one is hearing the programme anyway on long wave, it hardly matters how many Back Benchers are mentioned?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is right. I shall return to the point at the end of my remarks. Many of the options proposed by the BBC in its so-called repentance—hardly a Damascene repentance—are facile and need imagination to improve them. The best way to meet the public service requirement and maintain audience levels is through a creative approach, not just a managerial one.

All public service requirements are important, but support for our democracy is pre-eminent, as the hon. Member for Cathcart said earlier.

Mr. Maxton: The right hon. Gentleman is attempting to say that the BBC is interested only in its ratings. If the BBC was not interested in broadcasting this place, it would not have taken over the bankrupt Parliamentary channel and made it into a BBC channel. That has cost the BBC a lot of licence payers' money without any return, because it is not putting advertising on the channel. The BBC has also created one of the best websites on the internet—again free of charge and without advertising—with a lot of parliamentary coverage, which again it would not have done if it was interested only in ratings.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening to what I have said. The BBC has maintained its core values in many respects, but it has not done so in this case. I shall come back to the Parliamentary channel later. It provides the BBC with an easy excuse. The ghettoisation of parliamentary coverage on the Parliamentary channel is not the answer. The channel has a role, which I shall elaborate shortly.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I should like to draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to my correspondence with Sir Christopher Bland about the reporting on "Yesterday in Parliament" and "Today in Parliament" when my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made a statement on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The programme on the Wednesday evening was informative, but "Yesterday in Parliament" on the Thursday morning was almost a parody of "Week Ending", focusing on my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's mispronouncing of words. When I drew Sir Christopher's attention to the fact that his responsibility as a public service broadcaster was not to entertain but to inform, he did not take my point. The issue is not just the time given to reporting of Parliament, but maintaining quality, which is where the BBC has lost its way.

Mr. Davis: I accept what the hon. Lady says, which leads me to the issue of the dumbing down of the treatment of politics, which the BBC is sensitive about. I wrote the book that I mentioned at the start of my speech because of the televising of Parliament. I was concerned that one of its effects might be to dumb down the treatment of Parliament. I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Rotherham that the Chamber is not a particularly televisual place, although I do not associate myself with his comments about the looks and telegenicity of his colleagues.

Television is inevitably a more superficial medium than radio. The attention span of somebody watching television is often much shorter than that of somebody listening to a radio programme. It would be unreasonable to expect producers not to reflect that in the design of their programmes. They are designing for their customers. That is what created the soundbite society. It was not the fault of venal producers or people whose aim was to corrupt our political process; it was a response to the pressures of a broadcast system.

That has affected the behaviour of Members of Parliament. One reason for some of the corruption of quality of contributions in this place is the fact that time spent crafting a soundbite will have more effect on public opinion than the same amount of time spent crafting the sort of logical argument that the House has historically been famous for.

That problem is reinforced by competition. In the age of the zapper, people can switch in a moment between many channels. That drives producers and makes them more prone to go for soundbites that will keep the attention of the audience. That tendency is further reinforced by all the other media available to audiences, including video tapes, computer games and the internet.

With volatile audiences, programmers are tempted, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said, to focus on entertainment at the expense of information. That is a serious problem that has also infected radio.

However, that background makes radio even more important than it was before. It is our most accessible medium—our most democratic medium, if one likes. It is right that our most democratic medium should support our democracy. It is the most thoughtful medium. It is right that the most thoughtful medium should disseminate the argument, debate and logical exchanges that one hopes for from this House.

Radio 4 is the most vital component. It is the broadsheet broadcaster—the equivalent of *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. It is the most important channel for opinion forming. To continue the comparison with broadsheets, the FM broadcasts at drive times—the "Today" programme, "The World at One" and "PM"—are the front page. The reporting of our democracy should be on the front page of the broadsheets. Moving "Yesterday in Parliament" from FM to long wave is equivalent to taking it off the front page and putting it in a pull-out supplement, making it an optional extra.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): A throwaway supplement.

Mr. Davis: A throwaway supplement, as my hon. Friend suggests. An informed democracy is not an optional extra; it is a vital part of British society. The BBC's public service commitment should recognise that.

We take an informed democracy for granted in this country. It is not taken for granted in every country. Even now, people are fighting about the absence of democracy, as the hon. Member for Rotherham said. It is no coincidence that "Today in Parliament" was first broadcast spontaneously by the BBC with no pressure from Parliament in 1945 at the end of a war to defend democracy. We must not allow the priority given to democracy to slip away. The changes that the BBC has made to "Yesterday in Parliament" and "The Week in Westminster" are symptoms of complacency about the importance of democracy.

The changes also show a weak grasp of statistics. The 73 per cent. reduction in coverage for "Yesterday in Parliament" and the 65 per cent. reduction for "The Week in Westminster" were predictable. Labour Members predicted such outcomes and pointed out that the amount of parliamentary coverage in the 8 am to 9 am slot was increasing. The reduction was being caused by lifestyle changes. The same pattern was evident in August and on Mondays, when there was no parliamentary coverage.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): We should be fair. Although, as the right hon. Gentleman says, the reduction was predictable, the scale of it is stunning. Nobody predicted a reduction on such a scale. In any other organisation heads would roll in similar circumstances. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that any heads will roll in this case, or does he think that those responsible will be promoted?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman is the Chairman of an eminent Select Committee and is much better at scalp-hunting than I am. I shall not comment on whether heads will roll, but he is right to point out that the reduction has been dramatic. It is a serious affront to our democratic tradition in this country. The BBC should be worried about that.

We must assume that the BBC managers are intelligent people. They misinterpreted the statistics because they perceived politics as boring. That is an ignorant view. Anyone who sits in the House knows that this place can be the best theatre in the world. We are privileged to have free, front-rank seats in it.

Mr. Keith Simpson: Open all hours.

Mr. Davis: Unfortunately it is open all hours, and sometimes that shows.

Mr. MacShane: What about the quality of the comedy?

Mr. Davis: We have already heard a comedy turn this morning. I hope that the Whip, the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd), noted the quality of the comedy, if not of the team playing. On an extracted basis, "Yesterday in Parliament" and "Today in Parliament" could be exciting programmes. In many ways, the BBC did not make the most of them. It did not build its programming around them as it could have done; programming could have been built around "Today". The BBC should perhaps think about that creative response, rather than the simple jigsaw playing with the schedules that we have seen so far.

Politics is not so much boring as unfashionable, but democracy is not a designer accessory. It cannot be thrown aside because coverage of Parliament is unfashionable one year and fashionable the next.

What do I suggest in response? I reflect the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins): the options that have been offered are limited. The comments that accompany the options are often in defiance of the facts; they are extraordinary. The minimum that should happen, as the hon. Member for Rotherham said, is a return to the status quo ante—before the switch to long wave: a simple recognition of the mistake that cost those enormous reductions in programme coverage.

The optimum is a recognition that, if the BBC can experiment in one direction to reduce coverage, it can experiment in the other to increase coverage. One of the arguments made to me by BBC management has been, "We have a much better programme on long wave." In that case, bring the whole programme back to FM: have a 20-minute programme and see whether that improves coverage, which might be the deduction from the statistics before the switch occurred.

Keep the extra 10 minutes and bring the programme back to FM. Perhaps the BBC should try to build up the programme that precedes it and put a little more around it to reflect what is reported there. Of course, I also agree with the hon. Member for Rotherham that the BBC should put "The Week in Westminster" back in its original slot.

I respond to the comments by the hon. Member for Cathcart about the Parliamentary channel. There is one area where the BBC, by its own criteria, although not necessarily by mine, could be said to have succeeded: the

[Mr. Davis]

replacement of "In Committee" with "The Westminster Hour." That at least has given more volume, although it is an apples and oranges comparison.

There has been great temptation on the part of BBC management to say, "We have the Parliamentary channel. We spent £20 million of public money"—not the BBC's money—"on that." I applaud that, but the Parliamentary channel, the website and the internet site appeal to a small set of political junkies, to put it bluntly—those who are so enthusiastic about politics that they will get the *Hansard* if it comes down to it. Democracy is not about the few; it is about the many, if I may parody a new Labour slogan. That is not a demonstration of my movement to new Labour. I say to the Whip: I am not such a team player.

If one is not careful, one ghettoises politics, but perhaps it is appropriate that "In Committee", which is of specialist interest, should go through those media, rather than through the Radio 4 medium. Perhaps that was a sensible change. I did not think so at the time, but I at least recognise it now.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, even though we all welcome the BBC's purchase of the Parliamentary channel, that is in no way a substitute for bringing back "Yesterday in Parliament" to Radio 4 on FM? Many people need, in drive time, to hear what is being said, or what was said the day before, in this place. It is something that they can listen to on their way to work, during the most influential programme, when they are not able to be at home to watch the Parliamentary channel. Radio is a different medium because people hear it in their cars on their way to work, when thinking about the nation's affairs.

Mr. Davis: I agree with my hon. Friend. I cited the example of "In Committee" as a possible route to specialised delivery, but generally speaking, channel proliferation creates more, rather than less, demand for proper Radio 4 coverage. Indeed, as was pointed out in the debate in the other place on public service broadcasting standards, although one might have expected the digital revolution to deliver many new facts and data for people to make democratic judgments, it has not. It has generated a torrent of opinion, whirlpools of spin, which obscure, rather than reveal, the information that the public should have. That serves both the public and Parliament badly.

I move on from the narrow question of the specific parliamentary channels to the reporting of Parliament in the other news media and news programmes. The same problem applies with general news coverage. My primary example is "The World at One", the duration of which was cut. The aim of the cut was simply to increase audience figures—nothing else. It was not even audience figures for "The World at One"; it was audience figures for the drama programmes later in the day.

A core value of the BBC was sacrificed—the delivery of high-quality news coverage at a key point in the political and news day, namely, lunchtime—in pursuit of audience figures for later on. Indeed, it was theoretical because, again, the policy was proved wrong; it did not work.

Ten minutes may not sound much, but once the news headlines and the other structural parts of the programme have been knocked out, 10 minutes are more than a third of the time for discussion. As a result, an important institution that the BBC has created has been seriously damaged.

I return to my key point. The highest priority in public service broadcasting and in the public service remit is to support an informed democracy; that is paramount. The arguments that we have heard from the BBC are arguments of choice and market. That is not what I want from public service broadcasting. The whole point about the core values is that they should provide what the market does not provide. If the BBC does not do that—I say it as a right-wing, free market Conservative; I am part of the continuity Conservative party—and if it goes down the market route, it will take great risks with its claim for a monopoly grant from the public at large.

The BBC has to make a big strategic choice. Does it want to live up to the standards of its charter? Does it want to do what it should to support our democracy, or does it want to chase audiences? If it wants to do the former, it will always have my backing for its licence fee and for the support that is given to it. If it wants to do the latter, it will lose that support and become just another large broadcasting corporation.

10.18 am

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I say straight away that I am a fan of the BBC. It does a very good job. I do not want it to be privatised. As we know, when crises occur abroad, it is to the BBC World Service that many people rightly turn, so it is not a question of BBC baiting—if it were, I would not wish to be involved in such an exercise. However, I am critical, and have been from the beginning, of the reduced coverage of Parliament as a result of the changes.

I remember reading in the one of the Sunday newspapers, before there was any official notification of the change, that people did not want to listen to "Yesterday in Parliament" and were switching off in droves. I immediately recognised that the spin doctors were at work. I recognise the work of spin doctors, including the BBC's. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise when the official announcement was made about the intention to switch "Yesterday in Parliament" to long wave.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham and the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) referred to the vast reduction in the number of people listening to "Yesterday in Parliament". However, when the BBC spin doctors first told us that people were switching off in large numbers, I took the opportunity to find out the listening figures for the substitute items that went out when Parliament was in recess. If people were switching off in large numbers because they were bored by BBC reporting of Parliament, one would expect more people to listen to the substitute items. Surprise, surprise, almost exactly the same number of people listened to the substitute programmes—so much for BBC propaganda.

It has come as no surprise—certainly to me—that the "Today" programme has attracted no more listeners. As was revealed in previous discussions on the subject, the "Today" programme, like other radio programmes, inevitably loses listeners from eight o'clock onwards. There are a variety of reasons for that, the most obvious being that people go to work.

The document that has been circulated by the BBC states that the reduction in the audience of "Yesterday in Parliament" of 73 per cent.

"is broadly in line with the BBC's assessment in 1997."

I remember a meeting between the chairman of the BBC, the controller of Radio 4 and hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham. We were told that as a result of "Yesterday in Parliament" moving to long wave, there would inevitably be a reduction in listeners. That was not challenged, but there was no indication that the BBC was working on the assumption that the reduction would be anything like as vast as 73 per cent. So I do not accept for a moment what is written in the document and I doubt whether any hon. Member who has taken an interest in the subject is likely to do so.

I have met a number of people who no longer listen to "Yesterday in Parliament". As many of them are driving at the time, they are unlikely to start switching channels, as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham and the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden. Of course they will not risk a pile-up by trying to switch to long wave. Indeed, one would have to be obsessed with parliamentary reporting to switch to long wave in order to listen to "Yesterday in Parliament"; but if it were broadcast on the wavelength that one was listening to, one would not switch off because "Yesterday in Parliament" was on. I am not surprised that there has been such reluctance to switch from FM to long wave.

The document also states that the BBC remains committed to parliamentary reporting. If you believe that, you will believe anything, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My impression is that although its charter commits the BBC to reporting Parliament, it is reluctant to do so as it believes that that is not the way to attract listeners. Therefore, for a long time prior to the change that we are now discussing, it has marginalised parliamentary reporting. The most obvious example of that was the decision to move "Today in Parliament" to long wave, resulting in the loss of a considerable number of listeners. In effect, those who are responsible for programmes are saying, "We have to report Parliament and there is no way that we can get out of it, but we shall marginalise it as much as we can." Hence "Yesterday in Parliament" has moved to long wave and "The Week in Westminster" has moved to Thursdays from Saturday mornings with a loss of some 65 per cent. of listeners. The only parliamentary programme which has not been marginalised is "Westminster Live" on BBC 2, which has quite healthy viewing figures for that time of day. It is screened three times a week around the time of Question Time.

I have been in correspondence with the chairman of the governors of the BBC and have pointed out that all our freedoms and civil liberties stem from this place. The reply that I received was along the lines that I was quite right—they did not challenge that in any way—but that it is also part of the freedom of the BBC as an organisation to decide how to carry out the reporting of Parliament. I do not question that. I would be the last person to tell the BBC that it had to report Parliament at certain times on certain channels. That would be wrong and inappropriate. It would be much along the same lines as telling the BBC how to report other matters such as the military intervention in Kosovo and the former Yugoslavia. I would not want the BBC to be dictated to by the Government or Parliament, but I believe that it nevertheless has a responsibility adequately to report Parliament.

I regret that the broadsheets no longer report Parliament. Incidentally, I notice that occasionally when there is an important debate, exchange at Question Time or statement, *The Times* produces a summary of views, although it stopped doing that regularly some years ago. I hope that *The Times* and the other broadsheets continue with that.

A public service broadcasting organisation such as the BBC has a duty and responsibility adequately to report this place. It is not a matter of our egos. I know the cynical feeling in the BBC—not necessarily among the journalists, but among those who control programmes—that it is a matter of our listening to our own voices, but it cannot be trivialised in that way. We want those who want to listen to what is happening here and who recognise the importance of the decisions that are taken in both Houses to have the opportunity to do so; such reporting should not be marginalised as it has been and continues to be.

In conclusion, whatever they decide on this matter, the governors of the BBC should show firm leadership and demonstrate that they recognise that there should be adequate reporting of Parliament. If there is disagreement from the director general and the controller of Radio 4, the governors should lay down the line. It is not for us to do so, but for the governors of the BBC. I hope that they will do what they have not done recently and will face up to their responsibilities as so many of us want them to do.

10.28 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on introducing the debate. He will not be surprised that I agree with everything he said this morning as we have often shared this platform with other hon. Members who have spoken this morning and those who no doubt would like to speak if there is time. We have become a well loved regular cast on the subject in the past year. Maybe the BBC will think up a new soap opera in which we can be incorporated.

I should like to endorse a few points that have already been made. The first is the comparison between television and radio. A few seconds after a television appearance, 85 per cent. of the retained memories of what has happened relate to how we look. The great advantage of radio is that one cannot do that, so people concentrate more on the content of what has been said. As the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) said, radio is by far the better medium for getting across a complicated, many-faceted argument. That is what this place is all about. It is no coincidence that radio treats our debates far more effectively—or can do—than television. For that reason, all hon. Members who have spoken this morning have rightly concentrated on the three major programmes: "Yesterday in Parliament", "Today in Parliament" and "The Week in Westminster". Radio is where one may develop an argument, or follow its twists and turns without being distracted by the visuals.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden said that there should be a dynamic tension between the nation's assembly and the nation's primary broadcaster. That is right, and no hon. Member is suggesting that we

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

should be dictating to the BBC. However, it has to be accepted that the BBC's action last year was taken against all the advice that was being offered, not only by politicians but by a great many other professionals, both within and outside the BBC. I very much welcome the fact that the chairman now says that the BBC is prepared to accept that it made a major mistake. The House has to help the BBC to restore its primacy in public service broadcasting.

The Government could help us in performing that role. I hope that, in her reply, the Minister will deal with the point that there is a vicious circle. If Ministers are prepared to go on the "Today" programme and state in detail what they will later in the day tell the House of Commons, then later in the day, no reporter, journalist or broadcaster will cover the matter in the same detail. It is a vicious circle.

If statements are made outside the House—the previous Government were just as guilty of press-release politics as the current one; it is a tendency of which all Ministers should be aware—that is the way it will go. However good John Humphrys and Jeremy Paxman may be in questioning the statements of Minister or of Opposition spokesmen, they cannot perform the same function as Parliament. That is what we are paid to do. The main function of this place is to scrutinise, analyse and probe what is being said.

As the hon. Member for Rotherham said, since January, 35 statements have been made in the House. It is a remarkable number, and I welcome it—as this is where Government statements should be made—but I wonder how many of them were covered effectively by the BBC. I suspect that very few of them were.

Labour Back Benchers have a much better opportunity in this place of seeing, probing and questioning what the Government are doing than they ever will in the studios. All too often, studio set-ups comprise only a couple of people with distinctly different, usually partisan viewpoints, and do not necessarily deal with the substance of the issue.

Hon. Members have already mentioned in some detail the BBC's public service and charter obligations. I believe that Ministers also have an obligation to recognise that this is the place where major statements should be first made.

Hon. Members have also mentioned the mindset that lay behind the changes. I recall that, in both our previous debates—in March, in the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Rotherham, and in October, in my own debate—all hon. Members stressed that we were concerned not only about what the BBC was doing, but about why it was doing it. It was as if the BBC was treating the proceedings in this place as an esoteric, odd and peculiar hobby of a very few people. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden mentioned ghettoisation.

The changes seemed to reflect a belief that stamp collecting, underwater line-dancing or following the proceedings of Parliament could appropriately be pushed into a little corner, so those who were "obsessed with Parliament"—as the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said—could go away and listen to their heart's content. That is not what Parliament is about. Parliament is—or it should be—where it all happens. This is where the Government are held to account, and where Ministers and Opposition parties' spokesmen are tested. If those at the BBC do not realise that, they have not read what was said when the new charter was considered by Parliament, or what Ministers said about the BBC at every stage from 1946 onwards, to which reference has already been made.

I shall be as brief as possible, as I know that two important speeches are yet to be made. I should, therefore, say what I think that the BBC could do to redress the situation. Of course it would be great to return to the previous position, with the enhancement that the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden mentioned. However, I should like to offer option 12, which I believe really would deal with the "unacceptable democratic deficit" to which the BBC chairman referred.

"The Week in Westminster" must go to the end of the week; it is ludicrous in its current slot. If there is an extremely important debate on Friday, how will it be dealt with? Let us face the fact that, as we all know, private Members' business on Fridays can be extremely important to very many constituents. The programme must go back to Saturday. Moreover, I believe that it fits much better in the Saturday scheduling than in most other slots.

I should be reconciled to leaving "Today in Parliament" in the evening slot, on long wave. At that time in the evening, there is a rather specialist audience, and there are many other competing audiences. I would not therefore go to the stake to have it on both FM and long wave.

As hon. Members have already said, the critical programme is "Yesterday in Parliament". The point about loss of audience—which would have happened regardless of what was put in the slot—has been well covered. However, the audience that is retained is very much the informed audience that wants to be better informed, and the programme naturally follows on from the "Today" programme.

I suggest that, to ensure that there is still choice in that time slot, which the BBC says is so important, the BBC should let those who want to remain with John Humphrys and the "Today" programme go to long wave; that would really test it. If—as we are being told by the BBC—everyone wants to go with "Today" and does not want to stay with us, and if, as is suggested, the debate in the studio is far more interesting than the debate in this place, let "Today" go to long wave. That will retain choice.

If the BBC is determined that there must be choice at 8.30 am, let it make the choice offered by my suggestion, and we shall test which is the better solution. I think that the suggestion, as option 12, makes better sense than all the other 11 options offered in the paper. It would not only preserve choice, but demonstrate, once and for all, what that particular audience—from 8.30 am to 9 am, in the full period to just before the news—prefers.

Before very long, parliamentarians in both Houses will be asked to deal with the future role and responsibility of the BBC. Unless the BBC's chairman and governors respond positively to the concerns being expressed in this place, and by many other people outside it, and restore Parliament to its rightful place in the BBC's schedules, they will find us a not very sympathetic audience when they come cap in hand.

10.37 am

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): I should like, first, to state formally that, in his brief time left on the Back Benches, I am delighted to be associated with and to support my hon. and extremely ambitious Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on this matter—despite his slightly unkind remarks about those of us who prefer to appear on the nonvisual medium. As someone who has frequently been told that he has an excellent face for radio, I am somewhat sensitive about comments about avoirdupois and lack of hair. Nevertheless, I support my hon. Friend on the matter. I have also been amazed by the uniformity of opinion and agreement on the issue on both sides of the House.

The BBC has arrived at a perhaps uniquely British compromise in which it, in exchange for a unique funding mechanism, provides a unique facility and service. It is an odd arrangement, which is not immediately replicable in other countries, but it has worked extremely well. However, as is transparently obvious to all of us, it is not working now. If we are to assume that entertainment is all and that education is nothing, and to follow the Gadarene swine down market—dumbing down, as the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) said—the future is indeed horrible.

I have seen the future. On St. Patrick's day, I found myself in Ottawa, with the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale)—who is temporarily out of the Chamber—and we were treated to the sight of the Canadian Parliament in session. Canada has decided to have the full warts-and-all coverage. The Canadian Parliament delights in leaping to its feet and applauding certain speeches. The element of partisan activity on both sides of the Chamber is such that what little debate could possibly be discerned amidst the clamour and clapping is completely lost by ludicrous and antagonistic behaviour.

There is a lesson for us there. Whereas it is right and proper for us to criticise the BBC, we also have to accept some share of responsibility. Although incidents such as punching Ministers and waving the Mace around are, fortunately, few and far between, there have been occasions—far be it from me to enumerate them, although I am sure that they are known to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—when the behaviour of right. and hon. Members, and even of hon. and learned Members, has been such as to participate in a dumbing-down process. We have a certain responsibility there.

The important point is the unique status of the British Broadcasting Committee—

Mr. MacShane: Corporation.

Mr. Pound: A lovely 1950s word that I had forgotten for a moment. The present ethos is demonstrably wrong, as has been explained today. I was greatly impressed by the speech of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden—almost as much as I was impressed by my hon. and ambitious Friend the Member for Rotherham. However, the right hon. Gentleman made precisely the right point. If we are to support the BBC, the BBC must live up to its public service obligations.

It is not possible to live on a glorious past and an element of residual national affection, as that leads to no future. In any case, that job description has been taken by the Liberal Democratic party. All who have spoken today have spoken as candid friends. It might be said, "May the Lord spare me from my candid friends", but in this case, we are speaking not in anger, but more in sorrow.

It is not a question of political junkies. I appreciate that the Leader of the Opposition, as a schoolboy in the north of England—

Mr. MacShane: Rotherham.

Mr. Pound: I was trying to avoid saying that. Whereas the rest of us subscribed to *The Beano* or to Fulham football club's magazine, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) subscribed to *Hansard*. While the rest of us employed our evenings in far more useful purposes, he would thumb his way through the *Official Report*. There are few people like that. However, this is not about those few people who are obsessed with the minutiae.

It is a question of democratic accountability. This is about the forum of the nation; the place where decisions are taken that affect the lives of every single man, woman and child in these islands. This is the place where we act and speak on behalf of the people of this nation. We have a duty to be as open and transparent as possible in our activities in this House. The BBC has a concomitant duty to reflect that to the nation. That is part of democracy, and part of the process that makes this place work and makes the nation work.

Moving from what I still think of as medium wave to long wave may seem an arcane point, but it is symbolic, and it is symptomatic of a major problem. It is our duty, as has been expressed today, to draw the attention of the BBC to this matter, and to implore it and ask it respectfully—maybe with a hint of anger—to think again. It makes no sense, even in the terms by which the BBC defines its objectives: an increase in audience.

I am delighted to support my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham. I hope that the uniformity of opinion expressed today will be matched and responded to generously by the BBC.

10.43 am

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) on securing the debate, and on bringing the issue of the BBC's parliamentary coverage once again into the spotlight. There have been a number of excellent contributions, not least from my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) in a most thoughtful speech. I was particularly struck by his point about the potential ghettoisation of parliamentary coverage.

The audience measurements undertaken by Radio Joint Audience Research tell us that there has been a catastrophic drop in audiences for the parliamentary flagship programmes "The Week in Westminster", down by 65 per cent., and "Yesterday in Parliament", down by 73 per cent. Yet the BBC has failed to capture new listeners for the lengthened "Today" programme from 8.30 to 9 am.

In March 1998, the current changes were imminent. A number of journalists, many hon. Members and Madam Speaker forcefully tried to tell the BBC that the proposed changes would backfire. Indeed, Madam Speaker placed the correspondence on this subject with the chairman of

[Mr. Richard Spring]

the BBC in the House of Commons Library. On the issue, the BBC supplied answers to what it described as "frequently asked questions". One such question was:

"Does this package of proposals represent an effort to sideline parliamentary coverage, which the BBC regards as unpopular?"

The answer was:

"Not at all. Our parliamentary coverage on Radio 4 will increase by an hour-and-a-quarter a week when Parliament is in session in the new schedule. Far from telling us that the Radio 4 audience doesn't appreciate politics, our review told us that parliamentary programmes were highly valued by the audience, and that Radio 4 listeners are particularly receptive to this sort of programming. What we have attempted to do with the new schedule is to enhance our coverage and place it where its audience will appreciate it most."

Indeed. Such was the level of appreciation that three out of four listeners to "Yesterday in Parliament" simply switched off. Now we are invited, after 12 months, to respond to further consultations by the BBC.

What happened last time? On the core programmes for parliamentary coverage, the BBC was clearly warned what would happen, but went ahead. It amuses me to think of the sort of interview that John Humphrys or Jeremy Paxman might conduct on such points. Nowhere in the covering letter from the BBC, dated 24 March, or in the consultation document itself do we see the word "regret", or even "disappointment". I am therefore glad that the hon. Member for Rotherham read out that letter from the BBC chairman.

The conclusion to the latest consultation says:

"The BBC approaches this review with an open mind and will give careful consideration to the outcome of the consultation exercise. At present, following assessment of the available audience research, the BBC considers that it may be necessary to re-balance, to some extent, the need for Radio 4 to offer an attractive choice of listening in a crowded radio market with the BBC's obligations to give appropriate prominence to coverage of parliamentary proceedings as a public service. The BBC is open to change and wishes to identify the best way of reconciling the competing interests of different audiences."

I urge hon. Members to react constructively to the challenge and to let the BBC know their views. This is an opportunity that must be grasped, and we have heard some interesting viewpoints today, not least from the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler).

The BBC occupies a central place in the history and affections of the British people. It enjoys a considerable reputation abroad. Undoubtedly, there are many in the Balkans who today are being given a different and accurate viewpoint through the incomparable World Service. British actors and actresses are enjoying extraordinary acclaim. In the past decade, we have seen an upsurge of creative success in Britain. Dramas put on by the BBC have been quite brilliant; "Great Expectations" has got off to an excellent start. There is much to be proud of.

The BBC must face up to the digital challenge. As part of that, I recently saw for myself its "Where's Q?" digital archive facility, which is unique and fascinating. Digitalisation is here to stay, and I applaud the BBC for its response. The BBC's revamped annual report and accounts is a first-rate and informative document.

As far as political coverage is concerned, for many the day begins with "Today" and ends with "Newsnight"; required listening for a considerable number of people interested in public affairs. Additionally, "Any Questions" presents a lively range of political views on the radio each Friday evening. Equally, "Question Time" provides similar high-quality debate and argument on television.

The BBC is charged with a special public service responsibility. We have a Government with a large majority: an Executive that is all-powerful. Madam Speaker has frequently had to complain about announcements being made outside the House. In that atmosphere, the BBC must be very cautious. Several BBC employees have found jobs with the Government. Complaints have been made by senior journalists, notably Michael Brunson of ITN, about bullying by the Government.

Parliament provides a scrutiny of an all-powerful Executive, through oral or written questions, debates in the Chamber or Select Committee proceedings. The reporting of Parliament, especially in current circumstances, is extremely important. It is true that we are involved in a war although, mercifully, it has not affected us directly in this country.

At times of crisis, Parliament becomes the focal point of the nation. Today we do not have such terrible problems as mass unemployment or a realistic threat of global nuclear war, so on the whole the British people can wear their politics lightly, but that will inevitably change one day, in circumstances that we cannot foresee.

Parliament may be seen by many as boring, but a lot of important elements in life may not be headline-grabbing. Parliamentary coverage cannot be evaluated on its entertainment appeal. The BBC has made a mistake in its parliamentary coverage. In a rapidly changing marketplace, any response will not be easy to implement. Listeners and viewers are being given a multitude of choices, but it is none the less up to us to ensure that the BBC's public responsibility to Parliament and to the people of Britain whom we seek to protect is properly upheld.

I hope that, this time, the BBC will understand that. It is up to us to respond constructively and ensure that the central importance of our parliamentary proceedings is restored. I hope that today's debate will help the BBC in that process.

10.52 am

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Janet Anderson): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) for securing this important debate. It is his second debate of this kind, and we are all extremely grateful to him for giving us the opportunity to air our views. I hope that the BBC will cover this debate. I am only sorry that it is not able to be present this morning. I understand that it is holding a seminar to discuss its funding. Perhaps that is appropriate in the circumstances.

My hon. Friend said that he did not want us to engage in Beeb-bashing. I endorse that view. It is important that we work together with the BBC, and I welcome its acknowledgement that it may have taken the wrong decision. We all welcome the new spirit of consultation. I hope that all hon. Members will respond to that consultation.

My hon. Friend said that he hoped that I would not only give the Government's position but speak personally. There is a longstanding convention that broadcasting

Ministers avoid comment on programming issues, and I do not want to ignore that convention, but the BBC's governing instruments, the royal charter and agreement, which set the overall framework for its activities say specifically that the BBC shall

"undertake an appropriate process of public consultation prior to making any material change to the nature of the Home Service."

That means that the BBC has a duty to listen to the consumer.

The agreement also contains a specific programming requirement, first introduced in 1947, that the corporation

"shall transmit an impartial account day by day prepared by professional reporters of the proceedings in both Houses of Parliament."

Many hon. Members have mentioned the reduction in listeners following the changes, but the figures bear repeating. The BBC says that, although the total number of hours of parliamentary coverage on Radio 4 has increased, the overall reach is down by 26 per cent., with sharp falls in audience figures for "Yesterday in Parliament", which is down 73 per cent., from 3.13 million in 1997 to 830,000 in 1998, and "The Week in Westminster", down 65 per cent. from 658,000 to 227,000.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) raised the change in the arrangements for regional political editors in a previous Adjournment debate. I am sure that hon. Members of all parties still have some concern about that change. As a constituency Member, I am not entirely clear who my regional political editor is.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) made the point that the BBC is not there merely to chase ratings and that it has a requirement under its charter to ensure that our proceedings are properly covered. He reminded us that the charter is up for renewal in 2006, and I am glad that we have had the opportunity to start the debate on that this morning.

The hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) mentioned the fact that "The Week in Westminster" now seems to be a vehicle for Front Benchers. Like this debate, which is very much for Back Benchers—that is why I have not sought to speak for too long—"The Week in Westminster" should be an opportunity for Back Benchers to ensure that the country can hear what they are doing on behalf of their constituents.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) spoke of the broadcasting revolution that is taking place and suggested that perhaps we had not taken it into account. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), who is very knowledgable on the subject, rightly spoke of the importance of the BBC's duty to inform, educate and entertain—in that order—and suggested that, with the proliferation of channels, that duty was more important than ever.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Other countries have dedicated parliamentary channels, such as C-Span in America and C-Pac in Canada, and the BBC has introduced its Parliamentary channel. Is not it a little hypocritical of us to criticise the BBC, when we can get Sky Sports on the Palace of Westminster circuit, but not the Parliamentary channel? Should we not do something about that?

Janet Anderson: I take note of that contribution.

The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden made the point that it is almost inevitable that the BBC's audience share will reduce, and that must be taken on board. I thank him for his compliments to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who has supported the remarks of Mr. Alan Yentob, who said that quality must come before audience-chasing. Next month, my right hon. Friend and I will have meetings with the BBC's joint boards. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said that a reduction in listeners may have been predictable but the size of the reduction was stunning.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is a great supporter of the BBC. When I first took on this job, one of the first things that I learned is that, on important state occasions, people always turn to the BBC for coverage. That is, quite rightly, how the BBC is regarded.

I welcome the BBC's commitment to consult on the changes. I hope that it will hear the message that the House has sent this morning. It is a loud and clear message and I hope that the BBC will take to heart the gist—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It is time for our next debate.

Wildlife

11 am

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise the issue of wildlife protection and in particular the current state of many of our sites of special scientific interest—SSSIs. The debate is most relevant to my constituency. I have received a number of letters from constituents as a number of extremely important Cornish SSSIs are under threat.

SSSIs form the core of Britain's natural heritage—the so-called crown jewels—and contain a significant proportion of the remaining rare habitats and species in the United Kingdom; for example, 90 per cent. of the remaining reed beds in the UK have an SSSI designation. At the time, they were properly designated, but far too often their subsequent protection has been woeful. The protection of SSSIs is vital, not only to safeguard part of our natural heritage, but to ensure that the UK fulfils its international commitments under EU birds and habitats directives, the Ramsar convention on the conservation of wetlands of international importance and the convention on biological diversity. Once destroyed, wildlife habitats that have sometimes taken thousands of years to evolve can never be replaced.

When such habitats disappear, so does the wildlife that depends on them. The last fragments of woods, bogs, heathlands and meadows are havens that sustain many of our threatened animals and plants. There are a number of cases of damage to SSSIs that should be brought to the Minister's attention. The Lynher estuary is an important SSSI with a total of 687 hectares in south-east Cornwall—my constituency. The area is of national importance because of its role as a major site for wintering birds. It is estimated that the site is used by 6,000 wild fowl and about 10,000 waders, and is an important roosting area for 5,000 widgeon. However, the site has been badly damaged by intrusive agricultural activities and infilling.

To take a more recent example, during the past few weeks at Rosenannon bog and downs near Bodmin in Cornwall, an SSSI has been damaged by fire and more than half of the site has been severely damaged. The site was a crucial breeding ground for bird species such as skylark and stonechat and has been partially destroyed. It is suspected that the fire was caused by arson, although we do not know yet. No prosecutions have been brought, nor could they have been, because damage to the SSSI was caused by a third party rather than by the owner or occupier.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In the early 1980s, I was a member of the Wildlife and Countryside Bill Committee in which the question of prosecutions arose. We spent 100 hours in Committee discussing these matters. From his experience, is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is inadequate, or is it that the legal authorities do not bother to prosecute—or do not feel like prosecuting—under the complex regulations?

Mr. Breed: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, which is obviously based on his great experience. There have been no prosecutions, but I am not certain whether that is because of the inadequacy of the law or the inactivity of those prosecuting. It is a difficult matter. The evidence that needs to be obtained is part of the problem, but sometimes the prosecuting authorities consider that the degree of work and the costs involved are out of all proportion to the likelihood of obtaining a successful prosecution. Even then, the penalties that may be inflicted might not reflect the costs involved.

Surprisingly, it is not currently an offence for a third party to damage an SSSI: for example, fly tipping, which is unfortunately happening more often; the use of off-road vehicles, which is increasing in popularity; and sometimes arson, may well be illegal under other forms of legislation, but they do not currently constitute an offence of causing damage to SSSIs. There seems to be a loophole in the law that could be closed. However, even in cases where the damage is caused by the owner or occupier of the land, there is currently no way of prosecuting the offender or, more importantly, of preventing the damage from happening to the site in the first place.

On one occasion, a landowner wanted to plough an SSSI to grow flax. He sent his proposal to English Nature, but English Nature could only try to persuade that farmer not to carry out his plan. Unfortunately, he decided to plough the area regardless, causing severe damage and English Nature had no power to prevent that. Without the teeth needed to enforce protection of that site, all that English Nature could do was to sit by and watch another precious SSSI being raped for commercial interest. One of the most significant factors in that case was that of "forgone payments". Such payments are made to landowners as compensation for not carrying out an activity such as ploughing up land, as opposed to financial incentives to help landowners manage triple SSSIs positively. The compensation system must be changed to reflect what we really want—that is positive management, not passive inactivity.

The picture that I have presented of some parts of the south-west is certainly not unique. There are almost 5,000 SSSIs in England and Wales, and during the past six years there have been more than 2,000 cases of damage to those sites; 45 per cent. of all SSSIs in England are considered to be in an "unfavourable conservation status". Not only are the existing SSSIs in decline, but in England and Wales at least 46 sites have lost the SSSI status they had gained since 1981.

Every year, the Government statutory wildlife agencies publish data in reports that indicate damage to SSSIs in the previous year. On average, more than 300 sites are lost or damaged every year. SSSIs are not being protected from damage, yet they represent some of the most significant environmental sites in the UK; they are identified as "special", but are afforded little, if any, real protection to ensure that they can sustain that status.

The monitoring and gathering of data is one of the few things that the Government statutory wildlife agencies can do where SSSIs are concerned. However, there is no systematic monitoring of those sites. Information about damage is gathered only when local agency teams become aware of problems, so large amounts of damage often remain unrecorded and it is likely that the actual amount of damage will probably be much worse than the recorded figures. That situation is made even worse because conservation agency staff can inspect SSSIs only with the permission of the owner. Clearly, that must be changed if proper monitoring and early action are to be capable of implementation.

Ceredigion county council was responsible for the destruction of an SSSI near Goginan, east of Aberystwyth. Reclamation work on an old mine working had been agreed within strict conditions, yet, in breach of the conditions, a fence was moved allowing additional excavations and subsequently the destruction of rare lichens. The council escaped prosecution simply because its officials entered the site and carried out the work without the written authority of the landowner. That case shows how ludicrous the current situation is, when a third party can escape prosecution in that manner. Of course, it does nothing to deter other potential offenders from damaging SSSIs.

One of the most significant threats to SSSIs is the growing problem of water abstraction and pollution. Friends of the Earth estimate that 338 sites are under threat from loss of water. About one third of SSSIs can be described as wetlands, which are clearly damaged by water shortage and pollution. The damage may not be direct. Miles upstream, water may have been polluted, diverted or extracted with the result of enormous damage to an SSSI or an important wetland.

Development and construction is another major threat, currently affecting an estimated 220 sites. Sometimes, the economic and structural needs of a region clearly warrant new development. My part of the country has just received objective 1 status, and we want real economic growth. However, the environmental costs of such projects must be considered.

I sat on the Standing Committee that scrutinised the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, and I believed that the environmental aspects of RDA work should be given much higher priority and should carry more weight in the planning process. Specifically, SSSIs should be given strong and measurable indicators of environmental value so that a fair balance of overall costs and benefits can be struck against the indicators of a region's economic needs before development takes place.

Every day, a site is damaged or lost for good. Delay means destruction of more precious sites, and public concern is coming to a head. Only yesterday, wildlife organisations delivered 250,000 pledges calling for urgent action to prevent endangered wildlife to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The support in the country for action is reflected in the House, as noted yesterday at Question Time by the Minister for the Environment. A majority of MPs have signed early-day motion 11 to support the Wildlife Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper). Many Members welcomed Labour's manifesto commitment to greater protection of wildlife, but that commitment has not yet been fulfilled in legislation.

The Government's Green Paper does not go as far as another private Member's Bill that the Labour party supported when in Opposition. The consultation paper, "Sites of Special Scientific Interest: Better Protection and Management", is welcome, but it does not mention some serious threats to wildlife sites. The failure to recognise the problems of peat extraction and old mineral permissions are worrying. Permissions, often given many years ago and sometimes poorly drafted, are being ruthlessly exploited by greedy commercial concerns. We continue to condone the destruction of lowland raised peat bogs such as Thorne moor and Hatfield moor, although they are some of our best wildlife habitats. If the whole Green Paper became law, it would still not stop destruction of those sites by the peat industry, although I recognise the difficulties and costs of compensation.

The Green Paper is a welcome move in the right direction. It contains proposals to require restoration of an SSSI after it has been deliberately damaged. However, the proposals do not solve real problems on the ground. The legal changes proposed signal only modest change that will not meet the need for comprehensive protection. Furthermore, the timetable for action is inadequate. Changes must be made now to protect existing untouched SSSIs and to help to restore sites that have been damaged.

SSSIs are under threat in all parts of the country. That is bad enough, but it is worse that the perpetrators of the damage get away scot free and without prosecution. We are often critical of environmental damage in less developed countries, such as Brazil. Indeed, some hon. Members are today visiting South America. In our own prosperous country, however, SSSIs remain largely unprotected as they cannot be valued by any conventional economic price formula. The Members visiting South America might have found some desecration a little closer to home.

There is enormous public and parliamentary support for statutory protection of our wildlife and countryside. The Government must act to give important wildlife areas legal protection. They are making the right noises, but the consultation paper does not cover all the important threats. Meanwhile, time is of the essence. More sites are being damaged every day.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): I apologise to the hon. Gentleman and to the House for arriving a couple of minutes late for the debate.

The hon. Gentleman is entirely right to say that protection must be extended to SSSIs, and support for early-day motion 11 testifies to the House's view. However, there must be penalties and prosecutions if protection is violated. The person or company who violates sites must be susceptible to truly penal redress.

Often, the stakes are so high and the speculative possibilities of extraction so immense that people will ride roughshod over protection. They will accept a prosecution, paying perhaps some nominal fine, but perhaps not even that. Unless we put in place a penalty system that truly deters people from acting in that way, legislation, however well intentioned, will probably not have much effect.

Mr. Breed: I agree entirely with the right hon. Gentleman. Under the Competition Act 1998, the Government decided that penalties on companies should be a percentage of their turnover. Those are real penalties. The Government should indicate clearly what the penalties will be for violating SSSIs, and we should also insist that sites are reinstated as far as possible so that there is no incentive for people to challenge the system, pay a relatively modest fine, then secure considerable commercial advantage from exploitation of a site. Penalties must relate to the commercial profitability that may be generated from damaging a site.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am prompted by the interventions of the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): I meet regularly with business representatives to discuss issues, including interest rates. Compared to an average of more than 4 per cent. for the past 20 years, real short-term interest rates are below 3 per cent, at 2.8 per cent. Real long-term interest rates are at their lowest level for more than 40 years. Mortgage rates are at their lowest level for 33 years.

Mr. Boswell: I thank the Chancellor for that reply and acknowledge that the recent cut in interest rates has been helpful to business, but will he concede that there is still a substantial gap between our real interest rates and those of our competitors, particularly after the recent reduction in the eurozone? What consolation can he offer to businesses, which, despite the protestations of the Chief Secretary, are facing increases in taxation inherited from previous Budgets, additional regulation and a continued heavy burden of interest rates?

Mr. Brown: The people to whom the hon. Gentleman refers will be pleased to know that, while real interest rates peaked at 8.9 per cent. under the previous Government, they are now 2.8 per cent. under Labour. People can see the difference between the downturn in the early 1990s—when 1 million manufacturing jobs were lost, output in manufacturing fell by 7 per cent. and manufacturing investment fell by 28 per cent.—and the current situation with low inflation, interest rates coming down and a growing economy. The hon. Gentleman might want to tell his friends what the vice-chairman of the Conservative party said about the Budget:

"We welcome the help for small businesses. I think that is good. Overall, not a bad business Budget."

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the two surveys this morning that show growing optimism in small business, large business and the City are good news for Britain because we have a period of certainty and certain prosperity? Will he tell the Opposition to stop whingeing and talk Britain up, not down?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. I welcome the fact that he is chairing the all-party committee on Europe, which has no Conservative party representation. The British Chambers of Commerce survey shows that confidence in turnover and profitability is rising. We have managed to cut interest rates, keep inflation low, maintain stability and invest £40 billion in health and education—something that the Conservatives would not do. We have also introduced a minimum wage and the working families tax credit, which the Conservatives opposed, as well as increasing child benefit and introducing a £100 winter allowance for pensioners, something that we know that the Conservatives would never do.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Chancellor accept that the Liberal Democrats welcome the recent reductions in interest rates and hope that they can be sustained? However, does he acknowledge that there is a problem for savers and that some financial institutions have not passed on the full benefit of the reductions in interest rates to mortgage holders? In that context, is it not absurd to refuse to extend the benefit of the 10p income tax rate to income from savings, which would cost only £85 million?

Mr. Brown: As usual, the Liberal party wants to make another public spending promise that it has no means of meeting from any of its revenue proposals. The hon Gentleman is proposing another loss of revenue to the Exchequer, but he never says how he would fund his ideas. We introduced a new savings bond for old-age pensioners in the Budget. The individual savings account has been introduced and people are taking it up. The best thing that we can do for savers is to keep inflation low. Our policy is to keep inflation at or near the target of 2.5 per cent. I hope that the Liberals' finance spokesman welcomes our actions on all those issues. We are combining stability in the economy with help for the pensioners whom he says that he wants to help.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will interest rates be affected by the debt in the contingency fund brought about by the NATO operation? Is the Chancellor sure that the costs can be contained in the contingency fund?

Mr. Brown: It is precisely because of our prudence over the past two years in reducing the deficit from £28 billion that we are able to meet contingencies as they arise.

EU Budget Abatement

3. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If he will make a statement regarding the British abatement from the EU. [79446]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The Berlin European Council concluded that the UK abatement will remain. Our objective was secured: we said that the Government would maintain the abatement, and we have done so.

Mr. Brady: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his reply, although he has put a very positive gloss on a deal that will cost Britain nearly £200 million a year. Did the Government agree in Berlin that the rebate mechanism would also apply to other member states and to new member states? If so, who will foot the bill?

Mr. Brown: The conclusions of the Berlin summit, which I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not question, say that the UK abatement remains. The Berlin summit's conclusions also say that, in all the other matters on which we were pressing for advantage for the United Kingdom—whether on regional policy, on the highlands and islands or on Ireland—we got what we wanted. As for any other speculation on possible decisions of the Berlin summit, the decisions are as announced; there is nothing in them about what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Given the irredeemably split nature of the Conservative party on Europe, is my right hon. Friend aware of any independent commentator, anywhere in Britain or even in Europe, who believes that, had the Conservative party been in government, it would have brought back from Berlin a better deal than we have done? If he cannot find such independent

verification, is it not time that, in their own interests, Conservative Members stopped scratching that open wound?

Mr. Brown: I hope that the Conservative party will have a proper period of reflection on what went wrong under the previous Government. It is absolutely clear that our policy of constructive engagement has achieved far greater results—on the budget, on regional policy, in advantages for Ireland and the highlands and island, as well as on the abatement—than the Conservative party's carping and narrow isolationism ever could have done. My hon. Friend asked whether I have some advice for Conservative Members on what they might do. I simply refer them to the manifesto issued by the Conservative party in Scotland for the Scottish parliamentary elections. It starts by saying:

"On May 1st 1997 the people of Scotland told us what they thought—we got it wrong."

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Will the Chancellor give an absolute assurance that, during the negotiations on the future of the United Kingdom abatement, no horse-trading or compromise was done on the withholding tax? Is he aware of the consternation in the City of London, particularly among the 10,000 people whose jobs are at risk, at the fact that the Deputy Prime Minister does not even know what the withholding tax is? Will the Chancellor stop dithering and just say now that the Government will veto the measure?

Mr. Brown: I can give the hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance that there was no horse-trading on the matter that would have been in any way damaging to Britain—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Well, there was no horse-trading on the matter, if he wants that assurance. I can also say that—in preference to the Conservative negotiating tactics that would have left Britain completely isolated in Europe on that and on every other issue—we shall get the best deal for Britain on the matter, as we did at Berlin.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his negotiations on the abatement. However, is not the reality that the existence of the abatement—which was negotiated by a former Prime Minister—over many years, has undermined our negotiating position within the European Community, particularly in CAP reform?

Mr. Brown: No, I do not accept that. The abatement is wholly justified, and we have defended it. Conservative Members said that we would give away the abatement—we did not. The conclusions of the Berlin summit accept that the abatement continues, and Conservative Members should be congratulating us.

Millennium Compliance

4. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the Government's contingency plans in respect of a failure of systems at the new millennium in major financial institutions. [79447]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The Treasury has a wide range of contacts with both the Financial Services Authority and the Bank of England on the year 2000 issue. The FSA regards the issue as a major supervisory priority and has made it clear that firms that fail to implement appropriate measures face regulatory intervention. The memorandum of understanding between the Treasury, the Bank of England and the FSA sets out the role of each institution in the field of financial stability, including where there are exceptional circumstances.

Dr. Cable: Why did the Minister not mention in her reply the recent report of the FSA's director of supervision—which suggested that a significant number of high-impact financial institutions are so negligent that they have not even started to make preparations for millennium compliance and may well be required to close their doors in the new year, with incalculable consequence for individuals and small businesses? Will she explain more precisely what the Government, in addition to the FSA, plan to do to prevent that disaster from occurring?

Mrs. Roche: The Government are working closely with the FSA, and daily meetings are taking place. It is well acknowledged that UK financial institutions are perhaps the leading institutions in terms of year 2000 compliance. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the statement about those firms. Those figures were for the end of 1998. The authority has challenged those firms that appear to be less ready than others either to show that the assessment was out of date or rapidly to produce a plan for remedial action. Updated figures will be produced next week.

Self-employed (National Insurance)

5. **Mr. Richard Page** (South-West Hertfordshire): What estimate he has made of the increase in national insurance to be paid by the self-employed in 2000–01 as a result of the March 1999 Budget. [79449]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Barbara Roche): For 2000–01, it is estimated that the self-employed will pay £420 million less in contributions as a result of the March 1999 Budget.

Mr. Page: That figure is not an accurate reflection of the increases. Will the Minister give the House some calculation of what the effect may be on unemployment?

Mrs. Roche: On unemployment, I am a little disappointed that the hon. Gentleman did not congratulate the Government on the fact that, since the 1997 election, unemployment in his constituency has gone down by over 22 per cent. The changes will mean that self-employed people who pay class 2 contributions will benefit by £4.55 a week. We are the party that supports the self-employed and small businesses.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): What is the Minister's justification for raising the national insurance upper earnings limit next year and the year after by almost three times the rate of inflation? Is that not yet another stealth tax rise on middle Britain—a tax rise that the Government hoped that no one would notice? Will the Minister give an assurance that the Government

will propose no further increases in the upper earnings limit beyond the rate of inflation for the remainder of this Parliament?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman has a bare-faced cheek. The Conservative party raised taxation and broke its promises to the British people 22 times. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] Conservative Members are shouting because they do not like the facts—but they are going to hear the facts. Under the Conservatives, a small business went bust every three minutes. That is why middle-income families up and down the country voted with the rest of the British people for this Government at the last election, and why they will vote us in again.

Environmentally Friendly Road Transport

8. **Mr. Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): If he will make a statement on the impact of the measures in his recent Budget statement to encourage more environmentally friendly road transport. [79452]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): This year's Budget contained the most far-reaching package of environmental tax reforms ever seen in our country. In particular, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a number of measures designed to encourage the use of cleaner fuels and vehicles and to discourage unnecessary journeys. Those included a £55 reduction in vehicle excise duty for small cars, a fundamental reform of company car taxation, changes in fuel duties to encourage cleaner fuels and seven new tax relief measures to encourage employers to promote environmentally sensitive commuting. Those measures will help to reduce congestion and emissions of both greenhouse gases and local air pollutants.

Mr. Burden: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, and I welcome the cut in duty for liquid petroleum gas. Will she go further and encourage the use of more environmentally friendly fuels—for instance, ultra-low sulphur diesel? On vehicle excise duty, I welcome the step along the way in relating that to engine size, but does she agree that engine size is not the best measure of environmental performance? We need to look at much more exact measures, such as carbon dioxide emissions.

Ms Hewitt: The Budget cut duty on road fuel gases, including liquid petroleum gas, by 29 per cent., and we have widened the differential for ultra-low sulphur diesel. That differential is having such a beneficial effect that we expect that, by the end of the year, virtually all the diesel sold in this country will be the cleaner ultra-low sulphur type.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in the Budget, from next autumn we will introduce a new system of vehicle excise duty for new cars, graduated according to their emissions of carbon dioxide. That will give a very clear signal to people who are buying new cars to choose cleaner cars that do less environmental damage.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): The Minister trumpets the environmental gains in the Budget, but the measures will drive British hauliers into bankruptcy. British freight will be carried by foreign hauliers. Hauliers with trucks on the continent have told me that the foreign lorries are not maintained as well as lorries in this country. The freight will still be carried, the pollution will stay here, and it will be pumped out by less well-maintained, dirty foreign trucks.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is wrong as well as xenophobic. It was of course the Conservative Government who introduced the road fuel escalator, which he now apparently opposes. It was the Conservative Government who drove 5,000 British hauliers into bankruptcy. In the Budget, we froze the rate of vehicle excise duty for 98 per cent. of lorries for the second year in a row; doubled the VED reduction for cleaner lorries to £1,000; increased the differential on ultra-low sulphur diesel; cut the duty on road fuel gases; made it easier for hauliers to down-plate, as the industry has long requested; and introduced cuts in the rate of corporation tax, from which all businesses, including hauliers, will benefit.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): I warmly welcome the imaginative measures in the Budget to promote cycling, including the tax breaks for employers and employees to encourage cycling to work, which will go a substantial way towards helping us to achieve our target of quadrupling cycling by 2010. What is my hon. Friend doing to publicise those measures and to increase the take-up?

Ms Hewitt: I know that my hon. Friend sets an excellent example by riding his bicycle to work. We have responded to the pleas of various companies and the environmental lobby by introducing seven measures in the Budget to promote environmentally friendly commuting. Those have been warmly welcomed by both business and the environmental lobby, with which we are working closely to ensure that employers and employees know of the measures and take full advantage of them.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Will the Economic Secretary confirm that the further 12 per cent. increase in diesel duty in the Budget has made diesel nearly twice as expensive in Britain as on the continent? Is she aware that it enrages the British haulage industry that the Government dress up that huge revenue-raising measure as an environmental measure? How does it help the environment to drive British haulage firms out of business; raise the cost of all manufactured goods that have to be transported; encourage foreign lorries to come into this country using cheap foreign diesel and taking away British jobs; and to encourage British lorries to travel to the content to fill up with cheaper fuel?

Ms Hewitt: The right hon. Gentleman was a Treasury Minister when the previous Government introduced the road fuel escalator. It was he and his colleagues who described the road fuel escalator as an environmental measure. Less than 1 per cent. of road miles in this country travelled by lorries are travelled by foreign lorries. International competitiveness is simply not the issue.

In the context of the total tax and cost burdens on business, this country is the favoured environment for road hauliers, as for other businesses. A typical road haulier setting up in the Netherlands would face costs £600,000 higher than those in this country, and, for Belgium, that figure would be £800,000.

We are helping the road hauliers by freezing VED—*[Interruption.]* Tory Members clearly prefer to support the disruption caused by extremist lorry drivers instead of supporting us in our policy of discussion with the road hauliers through the new industry forum that we have set up. We took several steps in the Budget to help hauliers—by freezing VED, by widening the differential for cleaner fuels and by doubling the VED cut for cleaner lorries.

Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether the Conservative party supports the policy of disruption by lorry drivers, or our policy of discussion—

Madam Speaker: Order. It is not for the Minister to ask the Opposition what their policies are.

Industrial Energy Tax

9. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): If he will make a statement about the implementation of the industrial energy tax. [79453]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Following the recommendations made by Lord Marshall, the Government will introduce a climate change levy on the business use of energy from April 2001. The new levy will make a significant contribution to meeting our targets for reducing greenhouse emissions.

The climate change levy will entail no increase in the overall burden of tax on business, since it will be recycled in full through a cut of 0.5 per cent. in the main rate of employers' national insurance contributions. Businesses will also benefit from an additional £50 million for schemes aimed at promoting energy efficiency directly, and from extra support for renewable sources of energy.

The Government recognise the need for more special consideration for the position of energy-intensive industries, given their high energy usage and exposure to international competition. We intend to set a significantly lower rate of tax for energy-intensive sectors. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister initiated discussions with the sector concerned at a meeting on 29 March.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, and congratulate the Government on the way in which a consensus has been developed in recent months on the need for the climate change levy. However, does she agree that, although large companies are now well aware of the arguments surrounding the levy and the need for it, many thousands of small companies have not been party to the debate surrounding Lord Marshall's report, climate change and the Kyoto protocol? Can my hon. Friend assure the House that, in implementing the levy, and also in explaining its purpose, special attention will be given to the needs of small companies?

Dawn Primarolo: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance, because the consultation now taking place on the details of the scheme and the percentage of the levy, and the discussions on how it will operate, are not only targeted at assisting the energy-intensive industries. As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, they will also ensure that small and medium companies are aware of their obligations and of the process that will take place.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): The Minister has just emphasised the Government's environmental concerns, as the Economic Secretary did a moment ago. Ministers have argued for some time that they can justify huge and stringent increases in fuel tax for vehicles because they will be environmentally helpful. Given that the pollution of the environment by domestic energy is at least as great as that by vehicles, how can she explain the reduction that the Government made in domestic fuel energy tax?

Dawn Primarolo: The answer is fairness, and to assist pensioners so that people could afford to keep warm. The Government's targets for meeting their Kyoto obligations are clearly laid out, in connection with both the industrial energy tax and the measures taken in the transport sector, in the consultation documents that are to be published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Are not the energy-intensive industries the very ones that benefited most from the collapse in energy prices in the past 10 years? Oil prices have fallen from $30 a barrel to $10 a barrel, the price of gas has fallen by half, and coal is down to £30 a tonne. I am disappointed to hear that the Government have decided to introduce a lower rate when those industries have benefited the most from low energy price and have the most to contribute to carbon dioxide savings.

Dawn Primarolo: I am sorry that my hon. Friend is disappointed, but we need to pay especial attention to the question of competitiveness. The consultation document, which suggests an illustrative rate reduction for intensive energy industries, is designed to ensure that they make a contribution and fulfil their obligations. At the same time, we are mindful of the environment in which their businesses operate.

Savings

10. **Mr. Jonathan Sayeed** (Mid-Bedfordshire): If he will make a statement on his plans to increase the savings ratio. [79454]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Government want to encourage people to save more and that is why we have taken the tough decisions necessary to create a climate of low inflation, economic stability and an end to boom and bust. Those are the conditions that will encourage people to undertake long-term saving and improve their security.

Mr. Sayeed: The verdict of the professionals in the savings industry is that ISAs are more expensive and more bureaucratic than PEPs, and less generous. ISAs are not attractive to those on modest means, which is why Marks and Spencer and Sainsbury have refused to sell them over the counter in their supermarkets. As the decline in the savings ratio is especially acute among those who are less well off, will the Minister agree to publish and place in the Library a savings ratio disaggregated for each of the income groups and then explain to the House how she will encourage the less well-off to save, because ISAs are clearly failing?

Ms Hewitt: Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman suggests, ISAs are clearly set to be an enormous success.

I note that in the entire first year in which the previous Government introduced PEPs, 250,000 were sold. One provider alone has already sold more than 250,000 ISAs in the first week since their introduction. We have nearly 400 companies signed up to sell ISAs. National Savings, which was banned by the Conservative Government from selling TESSAs, will be able to sell ISAs through the Post Office as well as through the post. The hon. Gentleman may have observed that the Co-operative bank announced yesterday that it will offer ISAs and make them available at supermarket tills in precisely the low-income communities where we want to encourage more people to take advantage of tax-free savings.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): As my hon. Friend has said, the Government want to make ISAs successful among those lower income families who are the people we need to encourage to save. All the publicity for PEPs and TESSAs in the past few weeks will have soaked up some of the money that may have been available for savings schemes. Does my hon. Friend agree, therefore, that we need to give ISAs a reasonable amount of time before we can judge their success? I am sure that, in 12 months' time, my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be able to say that it has been a successful scheme for lower income families.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those points. He is right to say that the majority of savings schemes are sold in the last few months of the tax year rather than at the beginning of the new tax year. That is another reason why the take-up of ISAs in the first week of their introduction is so very encouraging. We know that the lock-in period that was one of the conditions of TESSAs was one of the biggest barriers to putting money into savings, especially for lower income people. People want to know that they can get at their savings when they want them, and they want to be sure that there are no nasty surprises or excessively high charges hidden in the small print. That is why we have introduced the cost access terms—or CAT—standards for ISAs, to ensure that they offer fair charges, easy access and reasonable terms in which people can have confidence.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I put it to the Minister that the demand for ISAs at the beginning of the new financial year is substantially down on the demand for PEPs and TESSAs in the same period last year. In addition, although it is not directly a Treasury area, the uncertainty in pension arrangements between now and 2001 and the introduction of stakeholder pensions is causing a vacuum in pension saving. If one takes together the potential decline in new pension schemes and the lower accumulation in ISAs than obtained in PEPs and TESSAs, I do not see how the savings rate will rise; rather, it will continue to decline.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman has done nothing but abuse ISAs ever since we announced the plans for them. I regret that he seems to have a vested interest in seeing them fail. On the contrary, we are confident that they will be extremely successful, as the take-up in the first week has already shown.

The Financial Services Authority has just published guidance to providers on how to advise people to make appropriate provision for their pension savings in anticipation of stakeholder pensions. As the hon. Gentleman will know if he has read the consultation document on stakeholder pensions, we will ensure that millions of people on middle incomes, for whom personal pensions have been, in most cases, a disaster because of the charges that were imposed by providers, will in future have access to a low-cost, secure form of provision through the stakeholder pension.

Debt Relief

11. **Mr. Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): What representations he has received from children with regard to debt relief. [79455]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The Treasury has received around 2,000 letters and postcards from children on the vital question of debt relief. The Government welcome the strong interest shown by many young people in debt relief and the poverty relief that can be made possible by it. Our plan for 2000 is to cut the debt, increase the aid to the poorest countries, sell International Monetary Fund gold to make that possible and increase giving by individuals and companies.

Mr. Goggins: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer and draw his attention to a letter that I received recently from one of my constituents, seven-year-old Joshua Deegan. Joshua's message is quite straightforward: "Help cancel the debt". For Joshua's sake, but more particularly for the sake of the millions of young children who live in the poorest, most indebted countries, will my right hon. Friend continue to press at every point to ensure that that noble aspiration can be turned into a practical reality in the new millennium?

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing to the attention of the House the concerns of one child, which are also the concerns of thousands of children who have taken up the issue. I applaud the work of the Churches and other voluntary organisations that have taken a lead in pressing for the millennium year to be remembered for the debt relief that is made possible.

I can assure my hon. Friend that, when it comes to the IMF and World bank meetings in the next few days, we shall be pressing our colleagues in other countries to join us in trying to secure in 2000 a debt reduction of $50 billion as a minimum, and an increase in aid to the poorest countries so that they receive $60 billion in 2000. To do that, we want initially to sell $1 billion of IMF gold. I hope that my hon. Friend will join me, as will other hon. Members of all parties, in encouraging individuals in our community to sign up to millennium gift aid, under which the Government and the Treasury will match donations that are given by individuals throughout Britain.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I am sure that it was only an oversight on the part of the Chancellor not to pay tribute to the previous Conservative Government's role in promoting debt relief. The idea of selling IMF gold was particularly promoted by the previous Conservative Chancellor, and many children in Britain supported the Conservative Government's actions in that regard. But may I ask the Chancellor about a quite different form of

debt relief which is in the offing? What calculation has the Treasury made of the savings on debt interest which will be given to companies as a result of an EU withholding tax, and of the costs that will be imposed on British pension funds if such a tax goes through?

Mr. Brown: I have already answered the question about the withholding tax and what the Government are doing, and I do not think that it is covered by this issue of debt relief. I am sorry that, on an issue for which there should be all-party support, the hon. Gentleman chooses to turn a question on overseas aid and international debt relief into an obsession with the Conservative party's policies on Europe. I did praise, and have on previous occasions praised, the work of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, although he seemed to get small thanks from the Conservative party for the work that he did. At the same time, there is an urgency about what we have to do over the next year; and I hope that Opposition Front Benchers will join us in pressing everybody in the country to take part in the campaign to secure international debt relief and make 2000 a year when debt relief is converted into poverty relief too.

Ms Tess Kingham (Gloucester): For many years, the United Kingdom Government have been at the forefront of pressing to persuade the IMF to sell off gold stocks to finance debt relief in developing countries. If today's media reports are to be believed, that campaign has achieved a measure of success and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his staunch and unending work in this area over the past couple of years. Will he elaborate on the details of today's media reports? What will the time scale for selling the gold stocks be? How much will be sold, and how will this be implemented?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that and for the work that she and others have done in pressing the cause of debt relief. We put the proposal to sell IMF gold to the G7 Finance Ministers' meeting a few weeks ago, as we have done on previous occasions. The American Government have said that they will support the proposal and the German Government, who have resisted in the past, are now in a position to support the proposal. I confidently expect that all G7 members will now support the sale of gold, so the IMF will go ahead with the proposal later this year. We have initially proposed the sale of $1 billion of gold. That is an initial sale that can take place, but there is pressure for more to happen.

Construction Industry Scheme

12. **Mr. Brian Cotter** (Weston-super-Mare): If he will make a statement on the likely impact of the introduction of the construction industry scheme. [79456]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The new construction industry scheme, which commences on 1 August this year, will significantly reduce the opportunity for tax evasion in the building trade. This will be achieved by restricting gross payment certificates to subcontractors who have met their tax obligations on time and have a turnover above the threshold we have set in regulations; and by requiring other subcontractors to register with the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Cotter: I thank the Minister for that answer. May I point out that the scheme will exclude 200,000 subcontractors from receiving gross payments? We are told that this is to combat £50 million of tax evasion. However, the figure calculated of tax liability for 714 tax certificate holders is just £1,800 per head. That means that £50 million of tax evasion is being drawn from only 27,000 certificate holders. Is it reasonable that 170,000 honest contractors should suffer being sidelined by contractors and subjected to cash flow problems in order to reach this small minority? May I suggest that there could be a fairer, more efficient way of avoiding this tax evasion than the scheme proposed?

Dawn Primarolo: I know that the hon. Gentleman has received many representations in his constituency and he has written to me a number of times on this matter, but I should point out some facts to him. The legislation to deal with this abuse in the construction industry, which has the support of the industry, the trade unions and associations, was first introduced to Parliament in 1995 with all-party support. It was further dealt with in legislation in 1996, again with all-party support. The issue is the evasion of tax in this area and was recognised by the industry, the trade unions, the Government and employment tribunals as a result of some hearings. The Government must take action. Instead of worrying about, and undermining, such action, the hon. Gentleman should be supporting the Government in dealing with a very difficult area. He should not break the all-party support that his party has helped to maintain until now.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will the proposed schemes announced in the Budget for other contractors follow the path of the construction industry scheme? The suggestion that such a scheme will be introduced for information technology contractors, for example, is causing a great deal of worry among all sorts of self-employed people and those who form single-member limited companies. Exactly what is the Treasury up to?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman is confusing a number of items. The clauses in the construction industry scheme which his party initiated, with our support, and which will continue, are designed specifically to deal with the problem of labour-only subcontractors—who used to be called the lump—in the building industry. The turnover threshold that we have introduced is set at a very fair level—lower, I might say, than the one his Government were going to set.

Shipping (Fiscal Regime)

13. **Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): What remit he has given to Lord Alexander's investigation of the fiscal regime for British shipping. [79457]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Lord Alexander has agreed to conduct an independent inquiry into the case for, and design of, a lower rate ring-fenced tonnage-based tax and additional enhanced training incentives for the shipping industry, taking account of the Government's objectives for shipping and the national and international competitiveness issues involved. The inquiry is to conclude as soon as is practicable.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. What assessment have the Government made of the

possible revenue implications for the Exchequer of a tonnage-based tax such as that in which the Dutch Government are engaged, which has resulted in a 37 per cent. increase in Dutch-flag ships, a 23 per cent. increase in employment in their shipping industry and a 19 per cent. increase in their gross domestic product? Will she confirm that the assessments will be made available to Lord Alexander, so that he can set them alongside the success of the Dutch scheme?

Dawn Primarolo: Those are precisely the issues that Lord Alexander will be considering in studying tonnage-based tax regimes in other European Union member states and, indeed, elsewhere. He will be supported by the Treasury in ensuring that the figures are detailed and correct, and will be making his recommendations on precisely such information.

Single Currency

14. **Mr. Geraint Davies** (Croydon, Central): What recent representations he has received from business on the single currency. [79458]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): My right hon. Friend the Chancellor receives many representations from business on the single currency.

Mr. Davies: Does my hon. Friend accept that support for the euro among larger international trading companies is much greater—as it is in the City—than among smaller companies, partly because larger companies see the natural trade benefits if we join and the prospective loss of investment if we never join the euro? What action is being taken to inform and advise small and medium companies on the benefits of the single market and the single currency—particularly those that link their supplies to international companies, which obviously have much greater interest in trading in euros?

Ms Hewitt: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Our priority for small and medium companies is to help them to adjust and to take advantage of the opportunities that were created by the introduction of the euro earlier this year. Some 750,000 small and medium firms in our country already have trading links with Europe. That is nearly half our small and medium firms. All of them could be affected by the euro, regardless of whether we finally decide to join economic and monetary union. We have been ensuring that they are aware of the euro and its implications, and have been helping them to adjust to that new reality.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does the Minister accept that many small to medium enterprises are operating at the margin? They are already reeling from new rulings and regulations from the European Union adopted by the Government, such as the 48-hour directive. Will she explain to the small to medium enterprises that, if we go into a single currency, interest rate policy will be directed from elsewhere and they will have to pay higher interest charges just for the benefit of other parts of the EU?

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend made it clear in his statement to the House in October 1997 that the overriding test for whether Britain should join the single currency would be whether it would be good for our economy and our businesses, for jobs, for investment and for the City. Of course that includes small businesses, but, at this stage, I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the priority is to ensure that small and medium businesses in this country, half of which already have trading links with companies in other parts of the EU, are given all the help that they need to trade with suppliers and customers who use the euro. We are helping small businesses to adjust to the euro. We are also helping them by introducing the lowest rate of corporation tax for small businesses ever in this country.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the Minister accept that, since the euro was introduced, it has been managed by the European Central bank to achieve a falling exchange rate against the Anglo-Saxon currencies? That has now been compounded by an interest rate cut in Europe, placing our trading exporters in industries and services in a more difficult position. Can my hon. Friend assure us that she is making representations to the European Central bank to try to prevent competition over exchange rates?

Ms Hewitt: I would observe that 80 per cent. of the rise in sterling's value came under the Conservative Government. We have made the tough decisions necessary to end the cycle of boom and bust, bring inflation down and get the public finances under control after we inherited from the previous Government a public sector debt of £26 billion. We have created the conditions for economic stability that, in turn, can underpin a stable and competitive exchange rate.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Does the Minister agree that many pro-euro businesses have concerns about the rate at which the pound will join the euro? Will she acknowledge that it is important that the level of the pound be reduced, because it is not competitive? Will she promote a public debate in the country and among our European partners on the sustainable long-term rate for the pound, so that we can join the euro at that rate?

Ms Hewitt: As I have just said, of course we want a stable and competitive exchange rate. The way to achieve that is to put in place the conditions for economic stability. That is what we have done by giving independence to the Bank of England and by ensuring that inflation falls and stays low. We now have the lowest long-term interest rates for 40 years, the lowest mortgage rates for 33 years, and the lowest rates of corporation tax ever. Those are the conditions for economic stability that, in turn, will underpin a competitive and stable exchange rate.

Economy

15. **Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): When he next expects to meet the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss the state of the economy. [79459]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alan Milburn): My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer meets the Governor of the Bank of England regularly to discuss a range of issues.

Mr. Skinner: Will my right hon. Friend tell the Governor of the Bank of England and anybody else he bumps into that, in Bolsover and Barnsley, people are not talking about the withholding tax yet? What they are talking about is jobs. Unemployment is a problem that has to be resolved by this Government before the next election. In about 120 or 150 constituencies mainly represented by Labour Members of Parliament, in the coalfields and old industrial areas, unemployment is still too high.

Will the Minister give a guarantee that, in the next few months, we will ensure that regional aid of all descriptions is not reduced? Will he also ensure that the 82 recommendations in the coalfields task force report, which would considerably help those areas, will be implemented and that the money will be found as soon as possible?

Mr. Milburn: As my hon. Friend is well aware, the Government are considering the recommendations of the report of the coalfields task force. He will be aware that the new regional development agencies have now come into being. They will act as a powerhouse for economic regeneration, especially in regions such as his and mine. He will also be aware that, since the general election, unemployment has continued to fall; employment has continued to go up; an extra 400,000 people are now in work; youth and long-term unemployment have been halved; and the new deal is proving especially effective precisely in communities such as his own that most need the creation of new jobs.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The business will be as follows:

MONDAY 19 APRIL—There will be a debate on Kosovo on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 20 APRIL—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 21 APRIL—Until 2 o'clock there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Opposition day [9th Allotted Day].

Until about 7 o'clock there will be a debate on Government taxation of the haulage industry. Followed by a debate on the crisis in British livestock farming. Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

THURSDAY 22 APRIL—Second Reading of the Disability Rights Commission Bill *[Lords]*.

FRIDAY 23 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 26 APRIL—Debate on defence equipment.

TUESDAY 27 APRIL—Progress on consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 28 APRIL—Until 2 o'clock there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 29 APRIL—Opposition Day [10th Allotted Day].

There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

FRIDAY 30 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 21 April there will be a debate on air transport competition rules in European Standing Committee A. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[Wednesday 21 April:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union document: 8582/97, Air Transport Competition Rules; Relevant report of the European Legislation Committee: HC 155-vi (1997–98).]

Sir George Young: The House is grateful for the announcement of next week's business and for the indication of business in the following week. Will the Leader of the House confirm that the Prime Minister will make a statement on Monday, following the weekend summit? We welcome the subsequent debate on Kosovo; I know that the right hon. Lady will want to keep the House informed about developments.

I welcome the reinstatement of the first of the new-style debates on defence that the right hon. Lady has announced. However, the debate that was lost was on defence and the world, which was planned on the grounds that it was logical to begin with policy and to move on to personnel and equipment. The debate that she has announced is on equipment. Is there a reason for that change?

There is still a backlog of promised debates: on the royal commission on long-term care; on the reform of the House of Lords; and on the national changeover plan for the euro. The House will expect to debate the recently published White Paper on modernising government and has still not considered the unresolved crisis facing the European Commission. When might we make a start on those important subjects?

There are no opportunities to question the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland until Wednesday week. Crucial talks have been taking place in the Province and the Secretary of State should keep the House in the picture by making a statement next week. Will the Leader of the House put that proposition to her right hon. Friend?

May the House be given the dates of the Whitsun recess, so that Members and staff can plan their diaries?

Finally, if the Prime Minister plans to be abroad on any future Wednesdays, could he take the Deputy Prime Minister with him and let someone else, perhaps the right hon. Lady, take Prime Minister's questions so as to avoid inflicting on the House the indignity that it suffered yesterday?

Mrs. Beckett: It is anticipated that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will make a statement following the NATO summit, although I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman realises that that will be a week on Monday. Of course, we shall continue to keep the House informed about events in Kosovo, as we have done assiduously hitherto.

I am not aware that there is any particular significance in the different title for the MOD debate, but I shall draw the right hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about a number of debates on which he said we are building up a backlog. I should point out that we have put in several debates, such as the one on Kosovo on Monday and the one—we had just before the recess. It is right and important that the House should have those debates, but they take up time that might otherwise have been given to other issues.

The issue of long-term care requires considerable thought and preparation. The Government will come to the House when we have something further to say in that respect. We are mindful of the desire to debate the House of Lords White Paper. It is only a week since we had the statement on modernising government, but I have taken note of the right hon. Gentleman's request for debates at some point on that matter and on issues relating to the European Commission.

I do not recall—although I would probably have said that we would consider one—any request for a debate on the changeover plans for the euro. However, I remind the right hon. Gentleman and his party that there is a committee discussing those plans on which the Conservatives are perfectly welcome to sit—indeed, they made a nomination to that committee, which they subsequently withdrew. To be frank, it is a bit much for the Tory party to refuse to engage in discussions on the plans, but then to demand a debate on them in the House.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about a statement on Northern Ireland. I shall certainly draw his concerns to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The right hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend is doing everything she can to resolve any difficulties that are arising there and that she endeavours to keep the House informed.

I am genuinely sorry to say that I cannot give the House any further information than I have already given on the dates of the Whitsun recess, but I shall do so as soon as I can. Finally, the right hon. Gentleman spoke about Prime Minister's Question Time, but I am sure that he has noticed that it is much rarer for the current Prime Minister not to be present at Question Time than it was for his predecessor.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): My right hon. Friend will know that Mr. Owen Oyston is in prison after being prosecuted on a charge of rape, and that many of us believe that he is innocent. Will she arrange for an early debate on the operation of the criminal cases review body, which lacks the resources to deal with a huge backlog of people who believe that they are innocent and await the referral of their case to the Court of Appeal?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall certainly bear my hon. Friend's remarks in mind. He has raised those issues in the House on several occasions and I feel confident that he will continue to do so. We all share the concern about the backlog in dealing with cases of that nature, and I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my relevant right hon. Friends.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): First, will the Leader of the House confirm a news report in the past few minutes that the appeal against disqualification by the hon. Member for Newark (Mrs. Jones) has been allowed? Would she care to comment on the Conservatives' having presumed, some weeks ago, that they could attempt to move the writ for a by-election in that constituency? What happens next?

Secondly, will the right hon. Lady comment on an issue that I have already raised on several occasions—that of charging for members of the public, including our constituents, to come into the Palace of Westminster? Will she tell us when the promised debate on the matter will take place, so that we—the Members of the House—can make a decision?

Thirdly, we warmly welcome Monday's debate on Kosovo; however, will the right hon. Lady give an undertaking that, although the main emphasis will be on the military situation, there will be time to consider the issue of refugees, which is becoming a source of considerable concern to people throughout this country? I draw to her attention early-day motion 521:

[*That this House congratulates the relief agencies on their efforts in response to the crisis in the Balkans, but regrets the delay in coordinating a response which left many people frustrated and angry that they were unable to offer personal contributions to the disaster relief effort; and calls upon the Government to create in partnership with NGOs a permanent disaster relief contact point with a published emergency hotline phone number where offers of assistance can be logged while a substantive response is coordinated.*]

The motion was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) and now has all-party support. It suggests that there should be a permanent disaster relief contact point. Many hon. Members will have shared my experience over the Easter weekend of trying to contact the various relief charities and finding it impossible to obtain answers to the questions that our constituents asked. I should say that the Department for International Development was manned that weekend.

Many of our constituents generously donated blankets, baby clothes and warm clothing, only to be told much later that what was really required was money. Will the Leader of the House confirm either that the Secretary of State for International Development will contribute to Monday's debate, or that the issue of refugees will be properly covered? If the issue is not properly addressed, a great many people in this country will begin to suffer from charity fatigue, because they will feel that their efforts are not properly appreciated.

Mrs. Beckett: I will deal with the hon. Gentleman's points in reverse order.

We are sympathetic to the proposals in early-day motion 521. I also sympathise with those who provided humanitarian help only to find that they had not done so in the most appropriate manner. The hon. Gentleman is correct: the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence will take part in the debate on Monday. However, I recognise that there may be a wish to take some cognisance of the humanitarian effort, and the Government are giving careful thought to how that subject can be addressed in the context of that debate.

The hon. Gentleman asked about charging the public for access to the Palace of Westminster. That matter has been raised in various House Committees and is still under consideration. No decision has been made even to put such a proposal before the House—although that decision may be made at some point. However, I make it clear that such a matter would be a decision for the House as a whole and would be taken only if the House considered it right, having weighed very carefully the many arguments involved.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked about the appeal, which I understand has been upheld. The implications for the legal case and for the House—to which Madam Speaker reported the earlier decision—must be considered. However, the hon. Gentleman is entirely correct to draw attention to the light it casts on the actions of the Conservative party in seeking to move the writ for a by-election which, if it had had its way, would have been held next Thursday.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): When may we debate the convention on the transfer of prisoners convicted abroad? The Leader of the House will know that two of my constituents, Paul Loseby and James Miles, have been in custody in Venezuela for the past two years. The Venezuelan Government have signed the convention, which now needs to be ratified by other countries. Could we debate this matter to ensure that British citizens convicted abroad—there are presently 2,000 Britons in that situation—can be returned to serve their sentences in this country?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend raises an important point about the general treatment of British citizens who

[Mrs. Beckett]

are imprisoned overseas. I am sure he will know that the British embassy is keeping a careful watch on the individuals to whom he referred and that they are said to be well, in the circumstances. The Foreign Office is examining, and plans to hold a seminar on, issues arising from cases regarding the handling of prisoners.

I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's request for a debate on the issue. It is not likely to be easy to find time for such a debate, although my hon. Friend may be aware that the Modernisation Committee is to make a recommendation to the House in the near future that might, if carried, allow more time to consider matters of this kind. My hon. Friend will know that Foreign Office Ministers are aware of those issues and are always willing to discuss them.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): As the first annual report and national plan of the United Kingdom anti-drugs co-ordinator is due to be published shortly, will the Leader of the House assure me that a debate will be held in Government time to enable all hon. Members to discuss the national anti-drugs strategy and its effectiveness since the appointment of the drugs tsar?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot give an absolute undertaking at this moment to find time for such a debate. However, I have taken on board the hon. Lady's request and will draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary the concerns of hon. Members on both sides regarding proper discussion of this matter.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we have a debate on a subject to which my right hon. Friend made a distinguished contribution in her years in opposition: the Treasury supplement? It is interesting to note that the supplement was introduced by the last Liberal Government, but was respected not just by old Labour and old Liberals, but even by old Tories. The Treasury supplement was paid until the late 1980s when it was ended by the previous Government and then reintroduced for a short period when they experienced problems with personal pensions.

Is it not amazing that, if the principle of the Treasury supplement had been respected, it would now be paying £9 billion to the national insurance scheme, it would allow pensioners to receive increases this year on the basis of level of earnings and it would allow repayment of the losses that they suffered for all those years under the previous Government, who cheated pensioners every year that they were in office? Is it not right that we return to a principle that was respected by Governments of all parties for 80 years, until wrongly ended by the previous Government?

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. I suspect that there are only a handful of Members in the Chamber who have the faintest idea what he and I are talking about. My hon. Friend is right to say that the previous Government took a sweeping step in first eroding and then removing the Treasury supplement. The supplement was the basis of the original welfare state settlement. My hon. Friend will know that the way in which benefits are dealt with and awarded and the way in which money is raised for the benefits system were transformed out of all recognition by the previous Government. It is this Government's aim to devise a new welfare settlement and to consider again how that settlement is funded. I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. I am not at all sure that he shares the view that we should return to the original historic basis of funding the scheme.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The shadow Leader of the House referred to a debate on Northern Ireland and linked that with the fact that it will be two weeks before we have Northern Ireland questions. The House will be aware that some hon. Members are no longer tabling questions on Northern Ireland. However, those of us who do find that we rarely get into the first half dozen, which means that pertinent questions from Northern Ireland Members are not followed through with supplementary questions.

Against that background, may I press the Leader of the House for a debate on Northern Ireland? I appreciate that there will be differences of opinion across the Chamber, but surely we can unite to support the Prime Minister's interpretation that no one can be in government in a democratic community who is backed by armed terrorists.

Mrs. Beckett: I appreciate the particular sensitivity of Northern Ireland Members in seeking to raise issues across the Floor of the House. However, the hon. Gentleman will know that the vagaries of the Order Paper are a difficulty for all Members in all circumstances. I shall bear in mind, as I have undertaken to do to the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), the concern that has been expressed for a further opportunity in the near future to discuss Northern Ireland matters, and I shall draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I accept that it was right not to have a statement today before the facts were fully known about what happened during the air strike on the refugees in Kosovo, but will my right hon. Friend consider whether there should be a statement tomorrow, when things will be a bit clearer? The urgency is that, with fast-flying aircraft, with pilots having to make split-second decisions while looking at all kinds of instruments and wondering whether they are locked on by lasers from the ground, and with many other complications, such incidents will inevitably happen again, again and again. That is the urgency and that is why there should be a statement tomorrow.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right—I am grateful for his recognition of the fact—to say that there is still a great deal that we do not know about the incident that took place so recently. Were it not for the fact that we shall be having a debate on Kosovo on Monday, I would be more ready to accept my hon. Friend's suggestion that perhaps we should consider a statement tomorrow. However, I say to him in all honesty that the matter is so complex and difficult that it may well be that we shall not know much more by tomorrow. As we are able to have a debate on Monday, when it is to be hoped that the position will be much clearer, I think it right to await that debate.

I understand my hon. Friend's underlying point that a statement might have an influence on those who are putting their own lives in danger in attempting to deal with the situation in Kosovo. I have no doubt that every member of the armed forces, whether British or otherwise, has very much taken on board the lessons of the terrible event to which my hon. Friend has referred.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): May I raise with the right hon. Lady again the question of Monday's debate on Kosovo? I recognise, of course, that the debate is on the Adjournment, and that that is in accordance with precedent. The Conservative party, when in government, had a number of debates on the Adjournment dealing with military action, so I make no criticism on that point. However, the precedent is surely not a satisfactory one. In a democracy, when a Government are taking military action in order to achieve stated objectives, they should come to Parliament to get consent both to the action and to the explicit objectives. Indeed, no consent by the House has yet been given. Therefore, instead of a debate on the Adjournment, would it not be much better to have a debate on a substantive motion that sets out the explicit objectives and seeks the authority of the House both for the action and the objectives?

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. and learned Gentleman says, quite correctly, that that is not the precedent. The Government do not rest simply on that fact. The precedent is that we have debates on the Adjournment precisely because successive Governments, Labour and Tory alike, have taken the view that that is the right way in which to proceed. The prior authority of Parliament is not required. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is seeking to change the historical and the constitutional position. Of course it is a matter of grave concern that military forces are committed. Such a decision is never taken lightly. However, the Government do not take the view that now is the time to change precedent that was set for admirably strong reasons.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 465?

[*That this House notes that the Government plans to take away all benefits from men, women and children currently seeking asylum, and that instead they will receive accommodation, food vouchers and a small amount in cash; further notes that the cash amount proposed for asylum seeker children is 50 pence a day; believes that no mother can meet the needs of a young child, over and above food and accommodation, on 50 pence a day; and urges the Government to reconsider this proposal.*]

The early-day motion has all-party support. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the arrangements for the children of asylum seekers? In their new legislation, the Government propose, among other things, to withdraw all benefits from asylum seekers and to replace them with hostel accommodation, food vouchers and a sum of money in cash. The cash sum proposed for children is 50p a day. I am the mother of a seven-year-old son. Even allowing for the fact that food and accommodation will be paid for, one cannot look after a child on 50p a day. If the Government's proposal were more widely known, there would be great public distaste, especially from our own supporters in the country. It cannot be right or part of a fair policy to force asylum-seeker mothers to look after their children on 50p a day. I urge the Leader of the House to find time for a debate on the subject.

Mrs. Beckett: I remind my hon. Friend that the Immigration and Asylum Bill is under consideration in Committee, where such matters can be thoroughly debated and thrashed out. Those issues will no doubt be raised again on many occasions during further discussion of the Bill. I understand, as will all hon. Members, the point that my hon. Friend makes. However, she has identified and clarified the fact that the long-term arrangements proposed by the Home Office cover all the basic essentials of life and of support for families. What we are talking about is spending money, but I understand my hon. Friend's concern. I am confident that those matters will be fully explored without the need for an additional debate at this time.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the Leader of the House grant us an early debate on the United Kingdom's relations with Latin America? Is she aware that, as a consequence of the Government's actions, Chile has recognised Argentina's claim to the Falkland Islands and terminated the only direct civil air link to the Falklands? Will she ensure that, in future, the Government put the interests of the British taxpayer and the British nation first in their relations with Latin America?

Mrs. Beckett: The Government are always mindful of the interests of the British taxpayer and the British nation. I remind the hon. Gentleman that it was the previous Government who, quite rightly, signed up to an international convention against torture. Such matters must from time to time be taken into account. With regard to his wish to have an opportunity to raise concerns about our relationship with Latin America, may I remind him that Foreign Office questions take place on Tuesday?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): When the debate on Kosovo takes place on Monday, can the Foreign Secretary definitely give us an accurate picture of what happened yesterday, whoever was responsible? Many of us, certainly the large majority of hon. Members, deplore the loss of civilian lives and sympathise with the loved ones who are left behind.

Is it not true that, if the Serbian leadership had been willing to accept the reasonable terms for a settlement in Kosovo, there would have been no military intervention of any sort and the horrors that have taken place in Kosovo, including ethnic cleansing, would have stopped, I hope, permanently?

Mrs. Beckett: I give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. The Foreign Secretary will give the House as much information as he possibly can about yesterday's tragic event. I endorse my hon. Friend's remarks and his view that none of this would be happening were the Serbian President to accept the proposals that have been put forward and to come to talks, recognising that the ethnic cleansing and the action of his armed forces must cease.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Given the Prime Minister's pathetically obsequious support for

[Mr. Eric Forth]

Mr. Prodi as President of the European Commission, and Mr. Prodi's almost admirable clarity of expression in the past few days in voicing his desire to build a federal Europe, may we have an urgent debate to tease out what the Prime Minister thinks will happen to this country as a result of Mr. Prodi becoming President of the Commission? How can the Prime Minister square what he was saying about Europe before the general election with his support for someone who is a confessed federast?

Mrs. Beckett: That is an interesting invention of a word.

The Prime Minister has been careful. It was unanimously the view of the leaders of the European member states that Mr. Prodi should become the new President of the Commission. Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Prime Minister are ridiculous. My right hon. Friend has been careful not to repeat the mistakes of his predecessor in talking about his choice of Mr. Santer. I remind the House and the right hon. Gentleman that the new President of the Commission—if he is endorsed—talks continually about a greater role for the Council of Ministers and, indeed, the European Parliament in guiding the Commission. I believe that that is what hon. Members on both sides of the House want.

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): May we have an early debate on recent Government measures to support families, particularly this month's record increase in child benefit, which will benefit some 14,500 families in my constituency? I need not remind my right hon. Friend that that contrasts all too starkly with the Conservative party's record when in government. It froze child benefit for three consecutive years, clearly revealing its view of support for family life. Does she agree that, in such a debate, we could show that 6 million families will be £2.95 a week better off as a result of the Labour Government?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is right. I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for a special debate on the matter in the near future, but the Finance Bill debates are next week. He and other hon. Members may find an opportunity to raise not only the issue of how much the Government are doing through child benefit, which I agree contrasts starkly with the record of the Conservative party, but the other proposals that the Government are putting forward, including the working families tax credit, which will transform the position of low-income families in particular.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given the Chancellor's complacent reply this morning at Treasury questions, may we have an early debate in Government time on the provision of debt relief for poor countries? Does the right hon. Lady understand that such a debate would afford Ministers the opportunity to announce the freezing of such aid to Zimbabwe, whose President has foolishly cut links with the International Monetary Fund and the World bank, and would allow the Government instead to redirect the resources available to countries such as Mozambique, which are poorer, better run and show greater respect for human rights?

Mrs. Beckett: I am pleased as well as surprised to hear a Conservative Member praising Mozambique and the actions of its Government. I did not hear what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said earlier but, knowing him as I do, I am confident that he was not complacent. He works very hard to secure progress on debt relief, as did his predecessor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). The whole House will welcome the possibility of movement on IMF gold sales and the general pressure to relieve the debt of highly indebted countries.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the relationship between the UK and the EU in the regulation of genetically modified organisms? I pay tribute to Agriculture and Environment Ministers for responding to public concerns and tightening the regulatory and scrutiny process. However, their actions could be circumvented by corporations going through the European route. My right hon. Friend will know that, in December last year, I was involved in the launch of the "GenetiX Snowball" public action handbook, which sets out how concerns on GM issues can be raised in this country. I am asking for a debate because there are now concerns that companies could use European regulatory systems, which involve less rigorous scrutiny, but would give them authorisation to plant and grow in the UK.

Mrs. Beckett: I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for a debate along those lines in the near future, but I shall draw my hon. Friend's concerns to the attention of Ministers. With ingenuity, he may be able to use the debate on livestock farming to raise some of the general issues about the handling of agriculture, if he is fortunate enough to catch Madam Speaker's eye.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Could we have a debate next week or the week after on long-term unemployment, particularly among 18 to 24-year-olds? The right hon. Lady will know that long-term unemployment in that age group came down rapidly for about five years. The new deal has been running for a year and statistics will be published next week, although I understand that they will be fiddled so that they are not presented in the same way as before. We should be able to have a debate to find out why unemployment among that group, who are having billions of pounds spent on them under the new deal, has increased over the past year rather than going down, as the Government and everybody else had hoped.

Mrs. Beckett: I am astonished that any Conservative Member has the gall to mention anything to do with fiddling unemployment statistics. I have lost track of whether it was 32 or 35 times that the Conservatives changed the way in which the unemployment figures were calculated, but we all know why they did it and what the effect was. The Government are pleased that long-term unemployment among young people has gone down by more than 50 per cent.—almost 55 per cent., in fact—since the election. About 250,000 young people have joined the new deal and around 60,000 have moved into jobs. I am confident that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment would like a debate on the issue, but I fear that the pressure on the time of the House is such that I shall have to disappoint him. However, I remind the hon. Gentleman that there is another Opposition day coming up. If he is

so confident in the Conservative party's brilliant record on the issue, perhaps he should press his Front Bench to select it for debate.

Angela Smith (Basildon): Early-day motion 493, in support of the minimum wage, says:

[*That this House looks forward to the introduction of the national minimum wage on 1st April, which will tackle the scandal of poverty pay levels encouraged by the previous Conservative administration; notes that this is yet another example of the Labour government delivering on its promises; and in particular congratulates the Right honourable Member for Makerfield for the years of dedicated campaigning and policy work he has undertaken to ensure the introduction of the national minimum wage and fairness at work for millions of people, achieved with the growing support of the business community.*]

Two weeks after its implementation, could we have a debate on the minimum wage? I am concerned that workers should be aware of their rights and eligibility. It would be useful for the public if there was a debate in the House of Commons. In my constituency, more than 1,200 people are benefiting from the national minimum wage.

The main reason why I should like to have such a debate is that, although the official Opposition oppose the national minimum wage, they have not made it clear whether they would reject it if they were ever to win another general election. Could we have such a debate, so that the public might know where the official Opposition stand on the issue?

Mrs. Beckett: I sympathise with my hon. Friend's call for such a debate. I recognise, as she said, the importance of people across the country knowing their entitlement to the national minimum wage. The Government are doing as much as we can to make that known. I also sympathise with her concern to learn the Conservative party's view on the issue. As she rightly said, Conservative Members fought the minimum wage tooth and nail, and have yet to come clean about whether they would abolish it. I fear, however, that I have to disappoint her. Were we to try to have debates on all the many matters on which the Conservative party has yet to declare its policy stance, we should do nothing else.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate on education, education, education? Across the country, it is about the time of year when parents are learning whether their youngsters will be able to go to certain schools. More than 50 parents in Clitheroe have been told that their children will not be able to go to Ribblesdale school, and that all the other local schools are full. They are now being told that their youngsters will have to be bussed many miles, out of their area, to get a decent education. I cannot believe that Clitheroe is unique in that experience. In this day and age, surely it cannot be right for youngsters to be asked to get up at 6.30 am to travel many miles outside their local education authority area to get a decent education.

Mrs. Beckett: It is always a source of concern to the House when it is not possible for every child to be accommodated in the school of their parents' choice. One of the most stupid and ill-directed things that the Conservative party did in government was to pretend to people that there could ever be absolute, unfettered parental choice, regardless of school size or places. However, as a result of what we have already done—in less than two years—to put money into education and to reduce class sizes, there has been a net increase of 12,000 places available in popular schools. So the hon. Gentleman's complaints are certainly not the responsibility of this Government.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): As we approach the Welsh general election, may I ask my right hon. Friend if we may have an early debate on the Government's commitment to invest an extra £1 billion in the national health service in Wales and an extra £844 million in education in Wales in the next three years?

May I also draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 523? It states:

[*That this House congratulates the Welsh Rugby Union team on their magnificent 32-31 win over England at Wembley; and notes the particular achievement of Neil Jenkins in scoring 22 points, coach Graham Henry and captain Robert Howley.*]

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend should rest content with having been at the match, rather than using the Floor of the House to gloat over those who were less fortunate. Although I am reluctant to be drawn into commenting on the issue of the Welsh rugby team and its successes, I certainly share his view that it is important that we should remind the British public and the public in Wales of the resources that the Government are already making available, after less than two years, to improve the health and education services that are such a high priority for the British people. We shall continue to seek opportunities to get that message across. I fear, however, that I cannot promise him an early debate.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May I reiterate the request of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)—in the light of the right hon. Lady's entirely unsatisfactory response to it—that the Prime Minister should come to the House to explain and defend his support for Romano Prodi as head of the European Commission? She must be aware that Mr. Prodi has explicitly stated that his aim is to create a single economy and a single state in Europe. The House is therefore entitled to know whether the Prime Minister supports those aims, or whether it was just sheer ignorance that led him to support the nomination of someone whose political aims are anathema to the people of this country.

Mrs. Beckett: A lot of sound and fury, signifying nothing very much, I am afraid. I should be more impressed by Conservative Members' complaints about anyone moving to create a single economy in Europe had not the Conservative party driven through the Single European Act.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Could the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate next year—*[Interruption.]*—next week, on the occult, secretive and criminal behaviour of senior Conservatives in Yorkshire, involving the embezzlement of a great deal of money? Is she aware that the senior South Yorkshire Tory,

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

Mr. Graham Pugh, the treasurer of the Doncaster Conservative club, has walked away with £33,000 of money entrusted to his care? The scandal is that the Conservative party is not seeking any police or other action to get the money back, and is trying to cover it up. Is that not in contrast to the actions of the Labour party, which has suspended councillors, brought in the police and done everything to ensure that, as far as possible, we run a clean ship? Labour's action is in contrast to that of the Conservative party in Yorkshire—where the leader of the Conservative party comes from—which is taking no action on that criminal activity. We need a full debate to expose the corruption and criminality of the Conservatives in South Yorkshire.

Mrs. Beckett: I am sorry to learn of the case to which my hon. Friend refers. I share his view—it has been made plain on many occasions—that it is this party that is determined to try to ensure high standards in public life, and to pursue anyone who falls short of those standards. However, I fear that I cannot promise a specific debate on the matter, not even if my hon. Friend is prepared to wait until next year.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Approximately 100,000 jobs are at risk in small rural food-producing businesses. Businesses such as abattoirs and cheese makers have been hit by a deluge of regulation and dramatic cost increases; as much as 10 times in some cases. If BMW had not done a deal with the Government to save Longbridge, 50,000 jobs in the west midlands would have been at risk. Here, we are talking about 100,000 jobs spread across rural England which will not be replaced. This is a matter of real urgency which justifies an immediate debate in the House.

Mrs. Beckett: There is likely to be a debate next week in which the hon. Gentleman or his hon. Friends may be able to raise those matters. The Government are conscious of the difficulties to which he draws attention, and we are doing everything that can be done to alleviate them. However, he will recognise that there has been growing concern in recent years over issues of hygiene and food safety. It is important to try to get the right balance, although no one is arguing that we have it yet.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Can we have an early debate on party political funding through foreign donations? The Leader of the House will be aware from press reports yesterday of the £18,000 that the Conservative party received in the run-up to the last general election from a Serbian company with close links to the regime of Slobodan Milosevic. Since the issue was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) at Prime Minister's questions yesterday, the Conservative party has made it clear that it sees no problem with the source of that funding. That attitude will be regarded with shock and repugnance by the vast majority of people in this country. Will my right hon. Friend therefore organise an early debate so that the Conservative party can explain and justify itself?

Mrs. Beckett: There will be a debate at some point on party funding, and certainly this party has set its face against foreign donations. I heard the well-timed and well-delivered intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) yesterday. I am sorry to learn that his appeal for that money to go to the refugees in Kosovo fell on stony ground.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Is the Leader of the House aware that, through parliamentary written answers, I have obtained clear evidence of blatant political bias in appointments made to NHS trusts and health authorities? Since 1 May 1997, some 228 Labour councillors have been appointed to those bodies. Will she ensure that the House has an early opportunity to debate what is a clear abuse of the Government's position?

Mrs. Beckett: I am extraordinarily grateful to the hon. Gentleman for asking that question. Despite the conclusions that he may have drawn from answers to parliamentary questions, he should be aware that the Commissioner for Public Appointments, in his annual report last year, reported that he had done a careful audit of NHS appointments and had found no evidence whatsoever of Ministers intervening to ensure the advantage of their nominees. I can understand the discrepancy between the hon. Gentleman's and the commissioner's interpretation. I can well believe that the former sees as blatant political bias the fact that any Labour members are appointed to the bodies from which the Conservatives sought to remove them altogether, but I fear that I cannot agree with that interpretation.

Orders of the Day

Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

1.15 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The function of the criminal justice system must be wider than merely dispensing justice. Every part of the system has a role to play in reducing crime and the fear of crime. As the House knows, tackling youth crime is one of our top priorities. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 created a new primary aim for the whole of the youth justice system to reflect that for the first time in statute. The aim is clear: to prevent offending by young people.

We need to deal firmly but constructively with young people who break the law. We must make them understand that offending behaviour will not be tolerated and ensure that they take responsibility for their behaviour as we try to deal with the factors that underlie it, such as drug and alcohol abuse, truanting and lack of parental support.

The Bill creates a new way of dealing with young offenders who appear in court for the first time, by referral to what we describe as youth offender panels. The panels aim to tackle the causes of the offenders' criminal behaviour so that their first appearance in court may, in many more cases, be their last.

The Bill is also designed to help the criminal justice system deliver justice for the people who are affected by crime. It has been a constant theme, across the parties, that, whatever the merits of our criminal justice system—and it has many merits—over the years, the interests of the victim and of the wider community have been undesirably marginalised. We must re-establish the system so that proper dignity and respect are given to the victim and to the community, both of whom are directly and indirectly victimised by crime. The victim must have a proper role to play in the system.

Under our proposals, all young offenders referred to youth offender panels will have to make reparation to their victims or to the wider community so that they understand the impact of their crimes. We are building on ideas of what has been described as restorative justice: a polysyllabic word designed to convey the idea that the justice system should try to restore some balance into the community and that the perpetrators of crime should deliver an element of justice to those who have been affected by them.

The ideas in the Bill draw on a great deal of experience both abroad—especially in New Zealand, where the family conferencing arrangements appear to be very successful—and at home, where some innovative experiments have been undertaken, notably the restorative justice projects in the Thames Valley police area, under the leadership of Charles Pollard, the chief constable.

The Bill provides practical measures to help victims and witnesses of crimes to come forward and give evidence at trials. At present, in far too few rape cases is there a satisfactory conclusion for the complainant: a caution or conviction. It is right, especially in so-called acquaintance rape rather than stranger rape cases, that the key issue of consent should properly be aired.

In such cases, it may well be that there will be a higher rate of acquittal than for some other offences, but it cannot be satisfactory that, at present, only one in 10 of complaints of rape end in either caution or conviction. We have to do better. The victims of rape and other sexual assaults must be given the confidence not only to report the crime to the police in the first place but to take the case to trial.

In our manifesto, we said that we would provide greater protection for complainants in rape and sexual offence trials, and for other people who are subject to intimidation. After the election, we set up a working group to consider how the criminal justice system could improve the way in which it treated victims and witnesses.

In June last year, the group published its report, a weighty and impressive document called, "Speaking up for Justice", which made 78 recommendations, 26 of which needed legislation. The Bill now takes those recommendations forward.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I am a bit concerned about my right hon. Friend's assumption that rape cases are likely to have a lower success rate than other cases. He seemed to assume that that was reasonable. Surely that cannot be so, because the standard of evidence that the Crown Prosecution Service asks for is already extremely high before such cases even get to court. I therefore hope that my right hon. Friend will reconsider his view that they are likely to have a lower success rate.

Mr. Straw: What I said was not an opinion—it was merely a statement of fact. With great respect to my hon. Friend, there is a difference. Even in my case, and holding the office that I do, although I would like it if everything that I said happened to be true simply by virtue of the fact that I said it, I find that that is not necessarily so.

The point that I was trying to make is that, when we are dealing with the facts about sexual offences, especially rape allegations, it is important to distinguish between what has been called stranger rape and what has been called acquaintance rape. With stranger rape, when typically there has been a violent and sudden attack on a woman not know to the assailant, the issue is rarely whether a rape has taken place; the evidence is incontrovertible. The issue is almost always the identity of the assailant.

In acquaintance rape, the reverse is the case. The identity of the alleged assailant is by definition known. The issue, which is always complicated, because we must remain aware that we are dealing with a justice system, is almost always whether a rape actually took place—in other words, whether there was consent to sexual intercourse.

That raises some complicated questions and, given the complexity of the issues, it is a simple fact that, with the best will in the world, a higher proportion of such cases are likely to end in acquittal than other cases that may be more straightforward. That is not a matter of opinion; I am merely stating some facts.

[Mr. Straw]

However, we want to ensure that, when a rape has taken place, whether it was an acquaintance rape or a stranger rape—and we should deal in particular with the issue of acquaintance rape—there is a greater likelihood of the case being reported to the police and brought to court and, where the charge is just, ending in a conviction.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Would not the CPS use the same criteria in either case, which should mean the same success rate whether the case that reached court was an acquaintance rape or any other kind of rape? The Bill is concerned with cases that reach the court, and they should be considered in exactly the same way, whichever type of rape is involved.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right. The basic principles that Crown prosecutors have to follow are the same for any offence. I shall deal with the detail later. We seek to secure a situation in which, because it should be easier to pursue a case to court and then, where it is just, to obtain a conviction, the CPS will no longer have to make a rational judgment that—because of the way in which a case may be derailed by what many would regard as irrelevant, but aggressive, cross-examination about a woman's previous sexual history—that case is not likely to lead to a conviction, and may even be withdrawn from the jury at the end of the prosecution case.

Part I builds on the principles of restorative justice that we set out in the White Paper "No More Excuses", published in November 1997. Those principles mean ensuring that young offenders take responsibility for their actions, make reparation to their victims, and can be reintegrated into the law-abiding community. In the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, we used those principles to reform the youth justice system overall. We created a final warning scheme for young offenders who are cautioned by the police, and a new sentence of a reparation order. Both schemes allow for imaginative interventions to ensure that young people confront the impact that their crimes have had on their victims and make reparation.

Although it is early days yet, the indications—from the experience of the youth offending teams operating in the pilot areas—are that the final warnings are a success. Instead of young offenders getting a warning with a wag of a finger, or a conditional discharge after which the offenders walk from court with no other intervention in their lives, youth offending teams are intervening in the lives of young offenders and their parents to try to get them to face up to what they have done.

We have built on those principles in designing the new referral orders. All offenders who are referred will have to make some kind of reparation, whether it is meeting the victim face to face, writing a letter of apology, or painting out graffiti to make good damage to the community.

I am glad to see a Scottish Member present in the Chamber. We have drawn on the experience of New Zealand and of the Scottish children's panels, which I have visited, and it is striking how much higher public confidence is in the youth justice arrangements in Scotland than in those in England and Wales. I remember writing to colleagues in the parliamentary Labour party before the election asking whether they had comments on the youth justice systems in England, Wales and Scotland and to feed back any information that they had. Overwhelming concern was obvious among colleagues from England and Wales about the ramshackle nature of the youth justice system, but the Scottish system received considerable support from Scottish colleagues. It is not perfect, as everybody recognises, but, by seeking to engage the youngsters and their parents in an inquisitorial rather than adversarial system, it has much more to recommend it.

The panel will operate outside the confines of the youth court. It will be able to discuss the consequences of young offenders' behaviour with them, their family and other supporters, and thoroughly investigate their circumstances so that action can be taken, wherever possible, to stop re-offending.

One of the major criticisms of the youth justice system that we all have, especially those of us who have visited it, is the dreadful spectacle of the young offender being a bystander to the theatre of the court. I have often sat at the back of a youth court—having had to obtain the court's permission to attend, because the hearings are private, although we are also seeking to change that—and seen young offenders who are, at best, detached and observing the proceedings without any engagement in them. They are talked at or talked through, but never talked to. At worst, the young offenders have an insolent attitude to what is taking place and are wholly alienated from it. We are trying to change that situation. We are trying to involve young offenders fully in panel meetings; and to oblige them to face up to what they have done and sign up to a programme of future action.

That approach is no easy alternative. Referral to the panel will be a court sentence, and the local youth offender team will be closely monitoring young offenders' compliance with the programme. Non-compliance will see them back in court for re-sentencing and, at that point, the court will have available all the sentences that are currently available. For many young offenders, the panel meetings will be an early opportunity to turn their lives around. That opportunity must be available to all young people who are ready to accept that they have done wrong and ready to make changes. That is why we want referral to youth offender panels to be the standard way to deal with first-time offenders who plead guilty. The Scottish arrangement is that an issue of fact—which happens infrequently—goes before the sheriff, but, if offenders plead guilty, they go straight to a youth panel. The new system is not a direct replication of that, but will build on the Scottish experience for England and Wales.

In other words, referral should be mandatory unless the court thinks that custody or an absolute discharge is more appropriate. That is why we firmly believe that offenders who have already started to take responsibility for their actions by pleading guilty would benefit most from the new approach. Therefore, we shall seek to reverse amendments made in the other place which made referral discretionary rather than mandatory for the target group of young offenders.

Where there is a multiple set of charges and a plea of guilty to one or more of the offences but not guilty to others, it will be open to the court, under the Bill as originally printed, to exercise its discretion on whether to make a referral to the youth offender panel.

I have referred to the experience in Thames Valley. With the consent of the parties, I had the privilege of witnessing a restorative justice arrangement. It was

impressive and far more thorough in engaging the young offenders and their parents than anything that I have seen in the youth court.

Before the panel were two offenders who had jointly taken part in thieving from a changing room. The victim who ran the organisation was present. Although she was not directly victimised, in practice she was the victim and had been under suspicion herself, entirely wrongly, for what had taken place. The mother of one boy and the father of the other were also there.

That meeting was facilitated by an extremely skilful police constable who had been trained in that area. She literally confronted the offenders with what they had done and got them to understand, through conversation with the victim, that there was a victim.

In particular, in the course of the meeting, one of the parents tried to excuse his son's behaviour. It became pretty clear from that that one reason why his son had gone down that road was that he had had no guidance from his father, and there was quite a confrontation with the father as well. It really was a case of justice being properly dispensed, and that was of great benefit not only to the offenders but to the victim.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Does my right hon. Friend agree that that demonstrates the necessity of parents at all times being part of the youth offender panel? Is there not a loophole in the Bill, in that children who are looked after might sometimes be represented only by a local authority representative? Will my right hon. Friend reconsider that to ensure that parents of children, even when they are looked after—it is perhaps more important when they are looked after—are required to take part in the youth offender panel?

Mr. Straw: I am told that the Bill says that that may or may not be appropriate. The basic principle is clear and runs throughout the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as well as this Bill. We want parents to be involved and to take responsibility for their children's actions, so far as that is reasonable, but also to recognise that, as the immediate carers of the children and the people most responsible for them—even if a local authority may have care for the time being—they have important responsibilities. I shall reflect on what my hon. Friend says. We should perhaps consider some amendments. As with other aspects of the Bill, we think that this is good, but not perfect, and we are always open to suggestions.

Part II is targeted at victims and witnesses whose youth or disability makes it particularly difficult for them to give evidence at court, and at witnesses who are so frightened or distressed at the prospect of giving evidence that they would rather drop the charges against an alleged criminal than face that criminal in court.

It is worth considering the statistics for witness intimidation, although they show only the tip of the iceberg. In 1995, there were 370 convictions—not complaints—for witness intimidation. In 1993, a study suggested that 75 per cent. of cases discontinued in one month were discontinued because a witness was missing or refused to give evidence. That amounts to 1 per cent. of all criminal cases. Again, that represents the tip of the iceberg.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Clause 27 provides a bar on witnesses giving evidence in person, in other words by pre-recorded video recording. May I respectfully suggest to the Secretary of State that we might be able to adopt the present procedure in cases involving children where there is a live video link of evidence from a place outside the court? Might that not be preferable to a pre-recording?

Mr. Straw: It may be. The hon. Gentleman may wish to approach the Committee of Selection to get on to the Standing Committee. As I have said, we think that the provision is good, but we do not regard it as perfect. This is a complicated area and, if suggestions are made, either in Committee or in writing to my hon. Friend the Minister or myself, we shall consider them constructively.

The Bill reforms the law on competence so that anyone who can understand questions that they are asked and give answers that the court can understand can give evidence at trial, unsworn if necessary. It gives witnesses practical help to give those answers.

Under chapter I of part II, courts will have a menu of measures available to them which they can award to any witnesses who need help to give their best evidence, whether because of a disability, because of the frightening or upsetting nature of the case or simply because they are children.

Some of the measures, such as intermediaries and communication aids, are designed to help witnesses communicate with the court. Others are designed to reduce the stress of the court experience: screens, clearing the court, allowing the witness to give evidence through a live link, or admitting a video recording in place of the witness's main evidence. Courts will also be able to direct that witnesses should be cross-examined on video before the trial.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): There seem to be considerable difficulties in cross-examining on video before a case has got under way, if only because, until the case has got under way and has become fully deployed, it is frequently difficult to know what the key issues will be. If one is faced with difficulty in challenging a witness because the examination on video has already taken place, the case of the defendant might well be severely prejudiced.

Mr. Straw: I understand the right hon. and learned Gentleman's exact point. His experience in court is much greater than mine, but I can think of many examples from the time when I practised when, with the best will in the world, it was impossible to predict the course of events until the drama, as it were, started. That is in the nature of the trial process. I found it salutary on a number of occasions when I thought either that I had an absolute winner or a stone-cold loser of a case to find that the reverse was the truth. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is correct to raise that concern.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State reminds me that it is to try to deal with that circumstance that we have provided for there to be secondary disclosure as well as primary disclosure before cross-examination on video in advance of trial. It is worth taking these powers. They will be used sparingly and in special situations. I repeat that we are ready to consider appropriate changes if the right hon. and learned Gentleman has particular suggestions to make. There is no suggestion that such cross-examination would become routine, but we seek to deal with some of the major problems that exist.

[Mr. Straw]

Some of the measures are already available for some witnesses. Child witnesses can already give evidence through video recordings and live links under the Criminal Justice Act 1988. The Bill makes the measures more widely available: courts will be able to award them to any witness who is eligible under the Bill. That includes complainants in rape and serious sexual offence trials, who will be presumed eligible unless the court is satisfied that they do not need help.

To return to a point raised earlier, the Bill also protects complainants in sexual offence cases from humiliating and irrelevant cross-examination designed to intimidate and undermine them.

Chapter II bans unrepresented defendants from personally cross-examining complainants in rape and sexual offence trials, and gives the court the power to impose bans on defendants' personally cross-examining witnesses in other cases where the witness needs protection. This is not a new idea and it is important to put that on the record. There has been a ban on defendants' personally cross-examining child witnesses in sexual and violent offence cases since the Criminal Justice Act 1991. There has been some suggestion that, if we extend that ban, it will somehow lead to miscarriages of justice. We know of no example of the use of the power in the 1991 Act leading to any allegation of a miscarriage of justice. Under this Bill, we propose to extend the ban to cover offences of kidnapping, child abduction and forced imprisonment.

We are going beyond the powers of the 1991 Act to make arrangements for defendants who do not want to appoint a lawyer to conduct the whole of their defence. They will be able to appoint a lawyer just to cross-examine, and conduct the rest of the case themselves. If they refuse to appoint their own lawyer, the court will be able to appoint a lawyer to test the evidence on their behalf. So witnesses' evidence will not go untested, and defendants' right to a fair trial will not be affected. However, I am clear that the ban will protect witnesses' right not to be mistreated in court.

Mr. Hogg: I can conceive of many circumstances in which a defendant who has refused to appoint a lawyer and has had one appointed by the court to conduct the relevant cross-examination will decline to give instructions to that lawyer. In those circumstances, there would be no effective cross-examination because there could be no effective cross-examination.

Mr. Straw: With great respect to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, we have thought of exactly that circumstance. We have anticipated that somebody may virtually refuse to recognise the court, or regard as a fundamental liberty the right to cross-examine in person and withdraw from any co-operation. I do not accept his conclusion that cross-examination would therefore be impossible, because the lawyer who is brought in, as it were on someone's behalf, to assist the court will have access to all the papers.

In many such cases, the line of defence will be pretty obvious. To be blunt, in a stranger rape case, the accused will be the wrong person, and in an acquaintance rape case, the woman will either have consented to the alleged sexual intercourse or the alleged sexual intercourse will not have taken place. So I do not honestly think that there is a forensic difficulty. It will obviously be easier if the defendant gives instructions, but not doing so will not by any means render the arrangement impossible.

In putting before the House the reasons for this change, I have only to mention Ralston Edwards and Milton Brown. They were defendants in rape cases and used the opportunity of cross-examination to humiliate and intimidate the women whom they were alleged to have raped. That was completely unacceptable; we cannot have that. Of course, at the same time, we must ensure that the justice system is exactly that: just.

It is wrong for the trial process to be abused in such a way. Given the abuse of power and trust that a sexual offence trial involves, further intimidation in court must act as a very powerful deterrent to victims who are deciding whether to press charges. Unless we impose a total ban on personal cross-examination in rape and sexual offence cases, as we are proposing, we cannot rule out that possibility for complainants.

Fear of confrontation with the alleged rapist is only one reason why rape victims often do not press their cases through to trial. Another reason is the fear—it is a justifiable fear—that the trial will focus not on the alleged offence but on an examination of the complainant's past sexual behaviour and character. Indeed, in her research on the treatment of rape complainants in court, Sue Lees found that, in more than half of the cases with which she was concerned, the complainant was subject to unjustifiable examination of her sexual history.

It is plain that past sexual behaviour is sometimes relevant in sexual offence trials, but there is clear evidence that it is being introduced too often and that a much better framework is needed to set out when it should not be admitted. Chapter III of part II provides that framework.

Clause 40 places tight restrictions on evidence and questioning about a complainant's sexual behaviour before and after the alleged offence. We do not believe that someone's sexual behaviour, whether promiscuous, chaste or somewhere in between, is generally relevant to whether they have consented to have sex with a particular person on a particular occasion—still less is it relevant to whether they are reliable witnesses. Sexual behaviour will still be admissible as evidence where it is really relevant to an issue at trial such as whether sex took place or whether the defendant honestly believed that the complainant was consenting, but the Bill will limit the ability of the defence to use the complainant's past to distract the jury from the issues at trial.

Mr. Cohen: Much of what the Bill does to limit the use of a woman's past sexual history as evidence in such trials is right, but will my right hon. Friend consider the loophole that I believe still exists in the Bill whereby a woman's sexual relations with someone other than the accused can be taken into account in the trial hearing? Why should that be the case? Why should a woman's relations with someone else be relevant in any way to an accusation of rape against a specific person?

Mr. Straw: We are dealing here with a process of justice. We want to see justice for victims but also for defendants. Making judgments on the matter has involved a very fine balance. If we go too far to protect the victims

by banning all sorts of cross-examination or adduction of evidence, we may end up with a situation in which a jury will not convict. We may end up with exactly the opposite of that which we wish to avoid. We have sought significantly to restrict the admission of evidence about previous sexual behaviour in terms of time and in relation to other individuals. Generally speaking, the evidence that is admissible will relate to what happened at and around the time of the alleged offence. There could be circumstances in which evidence relating to the woman's conduct with other people is relevant, and admission of such evidence is not completely ruled out in the Bill, but it will be restricted.

I am conscious that I have spoken already at some length. The issue of the reporting restrictions in the Bill understandably caused some controversy in the other place and I am sure that it will be the subject of discussion on the Floor of the House and in Committee. The Bill, like the report "Speaking up for Justice", seeks to make the law on reporting restrictions more consistent so that it is less confusing and less likely to be undermined by loopholes in the legislation. The idea is that all restrictions imposed in England, Wales or Northern Ireland will now be enforceable throughout the United Kingdom and will apply to all media, including the internet.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth): I hope that the Home Secretary received advance notice of the precise point that I wish to raise. It relates not so much to the content of the Bill as to the inclusion of Scotland in clause 48 and the related clause 40. Given that it is unlikely that the Bill will be through the parliamentary procedure by 1 July—the point at which the transfer of powers takes place—and given that, with the exception of abortion and drugs legislation, criminal justice and procedure are entirely devolved matters, what will be the parliamentary basis after 1 July for proceeding with the Bill as it relates to Scotland?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me notice of that question. First, the provisions create an offence in Scotland, but only in so far as that is necessary to enforce court orders made in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. As the hon. Lady will know, and I certainly know all too well, it is a matter of some concern that, for example, injunctions can be imposed in England, Wales and Northern Ireland but require separate action in Scotland. I do not make that as an ad hominem point; it is just that I have had some experience of the matter. It is anomalous and we are seeking to deal with it.

I am advised that the Bill will become satisfactory law whether it receives Royal Assent after or before 1 July. I am happy to take further advice on the matter. I will ensure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State replies in more detail on that point. If we cannot get the best, if not the most expensive, legal advice by then, I shall write to the hon. Lady. My hon. Friend was very expensive when he was practising—high quality—and no one but he knows what a sacrifice he made in order to take the Queen's shilling.

The courts will have a new power to impose restrictions to protect witnesses whose fear of the consequences of publicity is so great that they are unable to co-operate fully with an investigation or to give their best evidence at trial. The Bill extends the restrictions on the reporting of information likely to lead the public to identify children who are involved in criminal offences. At present, the law can protect children in that way only once charges have been brought. Under the Bill, it is proposed that the protections will start at the point at which a criminal investigation begins.

Those measures prompted a good deal of discussion while the Bill was in another place. Representations were received from the print and broadcasting media; their concern was that the changes proposed imposed an undue burden on them and their ability to report news effectively. We listened carefully to all that was said, and amendments have been proposed as a result.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I have a question about the general structure of clause 43. The Home Secretary states that, in his view, the Bill is compatible with the European convention on human rights. He will know that that convention sees the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy as co-existing. Why, therefore, is the Home Secretary structuring the Bill so that the restriction on the right to freedom of expression in relation to those aged under 18 is effectively a blanket ban on reporting, rather than a ban that is in line with the convention? Such a ban would imply a set of criteria that presuppose a need to impose reporting restrictions, rather than the presumption that reporting restrictions, and the abridgement of the right of freedom of expression, are right in all circumstances.

Mr. Straw: We are proposing that those restrictions can be lifted with parental permission. I signed a certificate on the front of the Bill stating that I believe that the provisions are compatible with the European convention on human rights.

Mr. Lansley: It is not necessarily true.

Mr. Straw: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I would not have signed the certificate unless I had been convinced of that. If clause 43 ends up before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, the mere fact that I signed a certificate will not necessarily be taken as good evidence before that court. I accept that, but we do our best; it is an important part of the process of bringing legislation before the House.

The principle of reporting restrictions has long been accepted; it goes back at least to the Children and Young Persons Act 1933. At present, there is an anomaly because those restrictions on reporting names and identities kick in only when the proceedings start, and not, for example, at the time of arrest. That is anomalous because, if the evidence against someone is extremely strong and the proceedings begin quickly, that person receives greater protection than someone against whom the evidence might not be strong and might later be dropped. Such a person might be the subject of press reporting, while someone against whom there is strong evidence will not.

I have thought long and hard about this matter. I want to make it clear that, although we have moved a long way to meet the concerns of the print and broadcasting media, we want discussions to continue. We shall also take account of what is said on both sides of the Standing Committee, because achieving the right balance is very difficult. We need to protect children from undesirable and unnecessary publicity, and it needs to be borne in

[Mr. Straw]

mind that that includes children who are defendants or potential defendants as well as those who are innocent victims. At the same time, the press and other media have an important role to play both in our democracy, by holding institutions to account, and as part of the way in which we hold individuals to account for their criminal behaviour. To reinforce that, my hon. Friends and I fully backed the arrangements that were made in the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 to give youth courts the power, after conviction, to lift bans on reporting altogether, without the consent of parents. We have sent out a circular to that effect and discussed it with the Guild of Editors and would like to see that power used more widely. The naming of young offenders, especially those in the older age bracket—15, 16 and 17-year-olds—is a powerful weapon and it should be used. That is not in any sense inconsistent with a concern to ensure that, up until the point of conviction, those people receive some protection. However, as I said, we do not believe that the provisions of the Bill as it stands are the last word; we are open to proposals on how to achieve a better balance, and my hon. Friend the Minister is taking a keen personal interest in that.

Justice is often portrayed as a balancing act, but it is not only about weighing various pieces of evidence so as to reach the right verdict on the defendant; it goes far wider than that. Justice matters to the whole of our community. Unless witnesses are able to give evidence at trial—and get help to enable them to give that evidence, if help is needed—crimes will go unreported, uninvestigated and untried. When offenders get to court, witnesses, victims and the whole community rely on us to take action to ensure that those offenders do not reoffend. If we cannot take that action, we run the risk of those offenders becoming career criminals, committing more and more crimes against their community. That must be the greatest injustice of all.

With this Bill and its predecessor, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, we have tried to rebalance the criminal justice system. I commend the Bill the House.

1.56 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): This is an important Bill, notwithstanding its rather curious marriage of two distinct and unconnected areas of policy. We believe that the issues would have been dealt with better in separate Bills, but the Government chose other priorities for their legislative programme, one of which hit the buffers a day or two ago in another place. No matter—the Bill's provisions are designed to achieve worthy objectives, and we are happy to give them a broad welcome. Although we are concerned about some of the more detailed provisions, we shall not divide the House, because we believe it important that the principles that underpin the measure should have the support of the whole House. We shall endeavour to be constructive in proposing changes, and today we shall indicate the general areas of concern that we want to explore in Committee.

When discussing youth justice, it is worth reminding ourselves that the majority of young people lead law-abiding lives and their experience of crime is as victims—of theft, bullying or assault. On occasion, they are the victims of violent assault or tragedy. I know that the Home Secretary will support my saying that, today, we remember the many young people who, 10 years ago, lost their lives at Hillsborough while attending the FA cup semi-final. On a lighter note, I ought to invite the right hon. Gentleman to say whether, as a Blackburn Rovers supporter, he is entirely satisfied with the outcome at Villa Park last night. I certainly am not, and it is a pity that his right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, was not able to intervene. However, that is another matter.

In respect of the provisions of the Bill, we agree that youth offender teams are an important development in youth justice policy and have a crucial role to play in supervising young offenders in the community. The previous Government first proposed the idea in its consultation paper, "Preventing Children Offending", which was published in March 1997. At that time, the concept of such teams related to juveniles of a younger age than those covered by the provisions in the Bill. However, I am sure that the Home Secretary, in the same spirit of co-operation that is obvious in my remarks, will acknowledge that the proposals for teams or panels to oversee the behaviour of young delinquents, so as to address early their propensity to commit offences, have been on the agenda for discussion for some time.

We agree that it is time to act. The proposal to require youth offender teams to establish youth offender panels, to provide tailor-made programme for individual offenders, is a natural extension of the team's role. We acknowledge that, but the panels will face a stiff challenge. They will need to address the growing problems of truancy and of drug and alcohol abuse that blight the lives of many young people and lead inexorably to crime. It is vital that the contracts drawn up with young offenders address those problems. The specific references in the Bill to those areas are welcome, although we will need to ensure that the range of measures that make up the contracts is sufficiently comprehensive.

We think that the concept of referral orders in part I is generally sound. However, it goes without saying that the execution of those ideas in practice will determine their success. The implementation of this initiative will depend largely on the quality of those appointed to the panels. We want to explore in greater detail the Government's thinking about who will be appointed to the panels and who will play a leading role.

We are concerned, too, that the resource implications have been glossed over and not thought through fully. In a recent answer, the Minister of State confirmed that, in the last year for which figures are available—I think that it is 1996—no fewer than 37,000 young offenders were found guilty for the first time in magistrates courts. The majority of them pleaded guilty. If the Government insist—the Home Secretary reminded us of his position today—that all those offenders should automatically be made the subject of referral orders, rather a lot of panels will have to be established each year, if and when the concept is extended across the country.

That is a big if. Our main criticism is that much of the Government's youth justice programme continues to be subject to extensive experimentation and piloting. We understand that, with any new policy initiative, it makes sense to see what works and adapt accordingly. We do not criticise that approach. However, the Government continue to make bold claims about their innovative approach to youth justice and how their policies are making a big difference to youth offending across the

country. The Government are entitled to make that claim, but we are equally entitled to say that, judging from the Government's achievements so far, this youth justice strategy has been—and continues to be—substantially oversold.

We have a long way to go before the real difference on the ground matches the impression of concerted action on the basis of which the Government's ideas are trumpeted. How many child curfew schemes have been established? How many parenting, child safety and anti-social behaviour orders—to which I shall turn in a moment—have been made? More to the point, how many action plan orders have been made? Our point is that it will take several years for the youth justice measures in this Bill to be piloted, adapted and extended to all parts of the country. In all circumstances, we encourage Ministers to be rather more candid about how much there is still to do before the reality matches their claims.

There are some very good ideas that, by and large, we support. Many of the more obvious successes in preventing youth offending, such as Crime Concern—the Minister and I will judge this year's Crime Concern awards shortly—resulted from initiatives taken by the previous Government. The Thames Valley experience to which the Home Secretary referred commenced under the previous Government. We are a long way from the comprehensive implementation of the Government's programme for youth justice on a national scale. Our message to Ministers is to recognise that fact. We urge them to show a great deal more commitment to delivering on the promises that they have championed to the electorate. That will be a theme of our approach to the Bill in Committee.

We encourage the Government to adopt a less rigid and more flexible approach to referral orders. As the Home Secretary acknowledged, the Bill's provisions were amended in another place to provide flexibility to magistrates in determining when a referral is or might be appropriate. We appreciate that the amendment needs refinement. I am slightly surprised that, as the right hon. Gentleman said, the first two clauses are contradictory. We accept that the amendment is not perfect but we urge the right hon. Gentleman not to use the Government's huge majority to reverse it without first listening to the arguments, some of which I shall explore now and some of which we shall certainly wish to explore in Committee.

I remind the Home Secretary that, in establishing the arrangements for action plan orders in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Government provided flexibility and choice to the courts. That seems to be in sharp contrast to the mandatory nature of the proposed referral orders. Yet, in many respects, the nature of both orders is similar. I constantly refer to a very good brief on the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act. It states that an action plan order is a new community sentence

"specifically tailored to address the cause of a child's or young person's offending behaviour."

That is equally the purpose of the proposed referral orders. Why is there such inflexibility on referral orders? What is the real thinking behind the mandatory nature of the order? Why exclude the Crown courts from passing a referral order sentence when they can impose an action plan order? Why limit the order to first-time offenders? What is the likelihood of confusion between action plan orders and referral orders?

Would it not make better sense if action plan orders were also delivered through a youth offender panel? The key point is that the Government have failed to make out a case for why all first-time offenders pleading guilty should be referred to the youth offender team in the way that is proposed. I think that the explanation of the Government's rationale lacks credibility. It ignores the realities of the day-to-day administration of youth justice.

We certainly agree that a properly established youth offender panel referral is in principle much to be preferred to a more general community sentence such as a community service order, a supervision order or a probation order. Reference to a youth offender panel—this is the strength of what the Government are proposing—would provide an opportunity for the young offender to have significantly more contact and support and guidance from the panel than he would, under current experience, from a supervision or probation order. However, it may not be an appropriate solution in each and every case where immediate custody is not an option.

For example, we think that it is wrong to assume that a first-time offender, perhaps in early to mid teens, has a behavioural problem or a propensity to reoffend that needs to be addressed in a referral order. The majority might have such a problem or propensity but many will not. Not everyone will have received a final warning or reprimand. The majority may be in that position, but not all. The youth involved may have been led astray by slightly older boys, some of whom may be young adults over 18 years of age. However, having been caught, he could well be expected to mend his ways.

It is a fact that the majority of youngsters who are caught and challenged do not reoffend. With that in mind, a heavy fine may be more appropriate in many instances. For example, if a youngster of previous good character becomes involved in a fracas late at night, that might involve older teenagers. Let us say that there is a collective charge and the youth admits to assault. Surely a fine would be less cumbersome in such a case than automatically requiring the court to refer the youngster to the youth offender team.

Why is the use of a conditional discharge ruled out? An absolute discharge is permitted. It could mean that a court would be likely to order an absolute discharge to avoid reference to a youth offender team. The benefit of some of the conditions attached to a conditional discharge would thus be lost. We shall explore the point in Committee.

Two of the key objectives of the referral order are the opportunities for reparation and restitution, but those may not be appropriate in every case. As the right hon. Gentleman acknowledged, restorative justice is still in its infancy—so much so that he had to explain to the House what it meant. The experience can be difficult for some victims, as the experiments carried out elsewhere show. In such cases, a court may be better advised to use a compensation order or a reparation order.

Tomorrow, when we debate the provisions of the Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, the House will be asked to agree new powers for courts to make restriction orders on football hooligans. To some degree, however, the provisions of that Bill will be discretionary. There is a reference to a duty to impose a restriction order, but that is discretionary, having regard to all the reasonable circumstances. What happens if a 16 or 17-year-old youth pleads guilty to a first offence involving assault outside a football ground?

[Mr. John Greenway]

The mood of the House and the view of the Home Secretary in supporting the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) are that restriction orders should be imposed. If it is a first offence, it is not clear to us how such a restriction order will be imposed given that, under the Bill as the Government want it to be, not as it is now, there will simply be a reference to a youth offender team.

All these arguments suggest that magistrates should have rather more discretion than the Government originally thought necessary when they introduced the Bill in another place and, as the Home Secretary reminded us, as is still his preference today. The rest of the Government's youth justice reforms, such as the action plan order, provide for flexibility. That is equally essential to the success of these measures. The Home Secretary said that he was always open to suggestions. In Committee, we shall explore the most appropriate way of providing for discretion.

If the Government insist on a greater degree of certainty in the application of the sentence than is envisaged in the amendment passed in the other place, a potential solution would be to require a referral order in all cases where the court would otherwise impose a community sentence, leaving all the other options still available.

The overall experience of other criminal justice and sentencing initiatives shows that, unless there are sound reasons, such as dealing with repeat offenders under the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997, rigidity and inflexibility tend to work less well and encourage a sense of injustice. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that I am one of those who bear the scars of our arguments about unit fines in the Standing Committee that considered the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Straw: An old lag.

Mr. Greenway: Indeed. That goes back a long time.

It is important to bear in mind that such feelings of injustice could arise if automatic referral to a youth offender team comes to be seen out there in the real world as an extremely heavy-handed response to a relatively minor offence to which a youngster pleads guilty.

We also question whether, by restricting the youth offender team referral to first-time offenders, the Government are targeting the most important group. Through the orders, we should be addressing the problem of persistence. That is the Government's main target, as we heard again today. Up to now, their youth justice policies have focused almost entirely on tackling the problems of persistent young offenders.

At present, under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, an action plan order can be imposed on a persistent offender, regardless of when he is sentenced. However, an action plan order has a life of only three months, whereas a referral order for a first-time offender can be for 12 months. An action plan order will not be delivered by a youth offender panel. We believe that it would be better if a youth offender panel delivered the contract for which both orders provide.

Angela Smith (Basildon): The hon. Gentleman's point seems to be that the Government are concentrating far too much on first-time offenders. Does he accept that all persistent young offenders were once first-time offenders who were not properly dealt with?

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Lady anticipates my next point. We are not saying that there is no case for focusing on first-time offenders. We share the Government's determination to nip in the bud early signs of criminality, but the Government's view is that all first-time offenders must be referred to the youth offender teams. That must mean that some will be referred when that is not necessary or in their interest.

We accept that the majority should be referred, but not all. The court ought to have some discretion with regard to such referrals—for example, if the parents are supportive, a parenting order in conjunction with a heavy fine could be sufficient. The Bill rules that out.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): As I understand it, the panels are for first-time offenders who plead guilty. Because of the hours during which the panels will meet, it will be much easier to involve parents. Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether he is in favour of that?

Mr. Greenway: Certainly. We are not saying that that is not a good idea—on the contrary. However, we are presenting to the Home Secretary a reasoned argument for discretion. Moreover, youth offender panels will not be an infinite resource. We question whether it is right to waste a panel's resources on an offender who does not need a youth offender panel referral. For a first-time offender who has pleaded guilty to a relatively minor offence, that is a heavy-handed treatment. The panel's resources could be deployed on another, more deserving case—possibly someone who has been in court before. Under the Bill, such cases are ruled out.

Why should the experiment be limited to first-time offenders, when there is such obvious potential for including in the project repeat offenders and involving their parents, as the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) suggests? Until now, those people never had the opportunity of benefiting from such a scheme. It is almost as though the shutters have come down, and all those who have been in court and pleaded guilty before can never have this wonderful new sentence—only those who appear in court and plead guilty in the areas where the scheme is to be piloted, and eventually, in five or six years, nationwide. That is nonsense. If it is a good idea, let us be more enthusiastic about how we implement it.

Mr. Dawson: It is interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman expressing views that I used to hold. If we are to tackle youth offending, should we accept youth crime as a normal part of growing up, or should we say that, every time a young person gets into trouble with the law, perhaps after he or she has been cautioned a couple of times, that should occasion an inquiry?

Mr. Greenway: I agree. Of course we should be saying that youth offending is not to be tolerated. Given what the hon. Gentleman has said, I look forward to his support for the parts of my speech on enforcement, which I shall come to later.

I add to my argument by quoting what the Home Secretary has put in the Bill. Clause 2(3) gives him the power to alter

"in any way the descriptions of offenders"

for whom referral orders are available. I cannot read that to mean anything other than that, in due course, Ministers will wish to extend the scheme to repeat offenders who are showing clear signs of persistence and whom we need to deal with. Why wait a year or two to do that? Why not do it now? The extension of the referral order to other offenders will be an attractive proposition if the panels are properly focused.

The Home Secretary will remember—we talked about it at the time—my general enthusiasm for the youth justice system in Massachusetts, which was commented on in the 1993 Home Affairs Select Committee report on juvenile offenders. It is still a good read.

I recognise that we are a long way off the Massachusetts youth justice department system, whereby youngsters "work their way out" of prison, but it is relevant—it goes to the heart of the philosophy behind the Government's proposals. The concept of a youth justice board—a nationwide body—a nationwide network of youth offender teams and individual panels for offenders to deal with their offending behaviour through contracts, makes sense only if we anticipate moving much further in the direction of individual contracts, not just for first-time offenders who plead guilty, but for all young offenders, whether they have just committed their first criminal act, or are more persistent offenders.

Ministers should recognise now, while we create the legislative framework for referrals and panels, the need for flexibility, and the opportunity for adaptation and extension of the experiment to repeat, as well as to first-time, offenders. Above all perhaps, they should recognise the need to avoid the confusion that will arise between action plan orders and referral orders—confusion over when each is available.

I put it in the most simplistic terms. As the Bill is drafted, or as the Government would like it to finish in the House, a mandatory reference is required for all first-time offenders who plead guilty. There is a structure in the Bill for the Home Secretary to extend the project if he wants to. It would be better to turn the thing on its head, make the referral order available for all young offenders and deal with the implementation of the experiment through guidance to courts on how to use the referral order sentence.

That would make much more sense. It would treat magistrates and youth courts with the respect over their discretion that they deserve. It would be a better use of the resources to be made available to the youth offender panel.

In Committee, we will want to challenge other rigidities in the Government's plans. Why, for example, limit the scope of the sentence to guilty pleas? That provides potential for the manipulation of the court's sentence. It is a serious point; I hope that the Home Secretary will listen to it. It would be perverse if it became the norm to plead not guilty to avoid the youth offender panel. If the panel has the teeth that we think it should have, the Government will have to consider that prospect.

Why rule out any use of the restraint of liberty? Will courts be able to justify a custodial sentence when youngsters who breach the rules are referred back to them? I listened carefully to the Home Secretary. He said that the whole sentence range would be available to courts, but we have to bear in mind that the court originally thought that custody was inappropriate for the offence. Therefore, if youngsters breach the rules and are referred back to court, will they get a custodial sentence?

Similarly, electronic monitoring would surely add much-needed teeth to the panel's powers of supervision and intervention. Are there no circumstances in which Ministers would envisage or countenance the use of tags or electronic monitors to ensure attendance of teenagers at school to defeat and to deter truancy, attendance at an attendance centre, or the following of a curfew to punish bad performance? Those ideas need to be explored.

To achieve their full potential, referral orders must deliver a clear sense of certainty of consequence if contracts are breached. What will be the point of preaching zero tolerance of anti-social and criminal behaviour if the same principle does not apply in relation to sentences imposed on those who are caught and prosecuted?

If the intention is, as I think it is, to put the fear of God into youngsters who commit crime—the point was made by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson)—we will need to ensure that the consequence of reoffending is certain. That threat must carry conviction. Unless youngsters are convinced that, if they breach the rules or their contract, or reoffend while under the care of the panel, retribution will be swift, the Government will not achieve their aims

Ms Keeble: The hon. Gentleman referred to where the plans had been tried out. I have seen such projects tried out. They work only because young people plead guilty and can then be worked with. He suggests the sort of sledgehammer approach that he said earlier was not appropriate for a first-time offender.

Mr. Greenway: No, I do not. If I have given that impression, I apologise. It seemed that that approach was acceptable in the action plan order that was included in the Crime and Disorder Act. The order is available even if people are convicted by the court and did not plead guilty. The principles are the same. If the young offender, however he gets through the referral order—let us discuss the Government's plan—pleads guilty, is referred to the panel, agrees a contract and then breaches it, what do we do with him? What attitude do we instil in his mind as to what to expect if he breaches the contract that he willingly embraced and entered into?

Many community sentences fail; those of us who follow youth justice know that. Home Office figures show that, on a good day, the failure rate of supervision orders for 10 to 17-year-olds is 80 per cent. They fail because there is inadequate supervision and because breaches are not treated firmly and harshly enough. That was the clear conclusion of the Home Affairs Select Committee report six years ago and in the latest report, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) was involved. Therefore, things have not changed.

The 1993 report recommended that breaches should result in a fresh court appearance and a custodial sentence—there was all-party agreement. We should build in the safeguards needed to ensure that the second chance does not become the norm. Word would soon get round if a second offence or breach of contract did not lead to punishment. That is why cautions were such a disaster.

[Mr. Greenway]

However, that does not mean an unnecessarily harsh crackdown—a concern raised by the hon. Member for Northampton, North. It would affect only those who breached the conditions. Those asked to serve on youth offender panels will have an opportunity to influence for good the lives of the youngsters placed in their care. That is one reason why I am so enthusiastic about the panels. We shall want to explore in Committee their membership, as well as the need for regular contact. Significantly more contact than is common under a typical probation or supervision order will be essential. We also want to talk about the many disciplines from which members of the panel may be drawn, including the probation service, youth workers, social workers, police officers, magistrates and other volunteers. Which will be the dominant influence? That could have a marked bearing on outcomes.

There is considerable potential in the youth justice elements of the Bill, but their success depends on a more determined, more focused and more flexible approach than is apparent from the measures that have been set out. The all-too-obvious failings over enforcement that have so disastrously characterised probation and community service orders in recent years must be avoided. Programmes must be rigorously researched and evaluated from the outset, or there will be a repetition of failure. The shortcomings that are experienced must not be kept hidden or tolerated to protect failed ideologies or professional status.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woking will speak at the end of the debate about the clauses that deal with evidence. There is general agreement that special measures are justified for the giving of evidence by vulnerable or intimidated witnesses. However, as the Home Secretary acknowledged, the proposals raise some issues of principle and we shall want to ensure in Committee that the right balance has been struck between the interests of witnesses and the interests of the accused. For example, there is some concern about the use of pre-recorded evidence, to which the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) referred.

As the Home Secretary knows, at the election, both the Conservative and the Labour parties promised action to protect rape victims from extensive cross-examination in court by their alleged attackers. He will also recall that we tried to press the argument during the passage of the Crime and Disorder Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) was involved in that. The Home Secretary rightly drew attention to the provisions on the questioning of child witnesses in the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which I have referred to in relation to another issue.

We agree that the issues are complex and some of the arguments are finely balanced. My hon. Friend the Member for Woking, who has greater experience of such matters, will seek to explore whether it is right to rule out any questioning by the accused or whether there may be circumstances in which the leave of the court may be sought. This is not a partisan point. The Opposition have perhaps an even greater duty than the Government to ensure that the Bill is far reaching and properly addresses the concerns of judges and lawyers on how best to serve the interests of justice.

The other place debated at some length the provisions in chapter III of part II for the protection of complainants in proceedings on sexual offences. The need to prevent spurious references to the previous sexual history of rape victims could not be clearer. The Home Secretary referred to the cases of Edwards and Brown. Some years ago, when I was sitting somewhere near where the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) is now sitting, I urged my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) to change the rules on disclosure. I referred to the case of a teenage girl who was subjected to an appalling rape ordeal. The police and the Crown Prosecution Service abandoned the prosecution of five young men on charges of gang rape in a west London multi-storey car park because the girl had been raped before and they understandably felt that it would be unreasonable to subject her to cross-examination in court about her previous experience, which the law would have allowed. The Bill will rightly prohibit such humiliating questioning of rape victims.

The debate in the other place resulted in a change to the wording of clause 40(3)(b)(ii). The change would allow reference to be made to the previous behaviour of the complainant in circumstances similar to those surrounding the case that I have mentioned. I shall not labour the point now, but I ask the Minister to read the wording of the redrafted sub-paragraph and the wording of the explanatory notes, because the two are not the same. There is significant doubt about what the sub-paragraph is supposed to mean. The explanatory notes say on page 25:

"The issue is whether the complainant consented and the evidence or questioning relates to behaviour that is extremely similar to the defence's version of the complainant's behaviour at the time of the alleged offence and cannot reasonable be explained as a coincidence."

That does not mean the same as the wording of the amended sub-paragraph. We can explore that later. It shows the importance of examining the words very carefully. If we get the meaning wrong and the legislation is interpreted differently by the courts, we could well find that what Parliament thought that it intended is not reflected in the Bill.

Ms Keeble: When the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) deals with the issue later, perhaps he will take on board the point that the proposals are strongly supported by male rape victims. I have had several letters on the subject from constituents. The example that the hon. Gentleman gave involved a woman, as most rape cases do, but we should also consider male rape victims.

Mr. Greenway: I endorse what the hon. Lady has said.

We also welcome the changes made in the other place to the proposals on reporting restrictions for offences committed against persons under 18. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) intervened on the Home Secretary to point out that not everyone is satisfied. The Guild of Editors thinks that the clauses need further attention. We anticipate constructive dialogue in Committee as we test whether the changes meet what is required.

The Bill provides many important opportunities to improve our criminal justice system and the provision of youth justice. We have an opportunity to ensure that vulnerable witnesses can give evidence free from fear, distress and intimidation in a manner that properly

recognises their needs as child witnesses or any needs arising from any disability that they may have. We have an opportunity to prevent the victims of rape and serious sexual assault from having to relive their ordeal in court because of unnecessarily intrusive questioning by their assailant or by having slurs cast on their character without proper justification. We have an opportunity to protect young people who are victims of serious crime from over-intrusive or sensational press reporting of their ordeal. We have the opportunity to create a new approach to tackling the problems of young offenders. However, to make a real difference, the Government must show that they are prepared to make the commitment and put in the resources that are vital to the success of a dedicated crusade against youth crime. We have yet to be convinced of that commitment.

2.40 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak—especially so early—in the debate, and particularly to address some of the issues concerning children and young people. The Bill is extremely important and worthy, and my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Home Office should be proud of it. I am also pleased to hear that it will attract widespread support, which is right and proper.

There are many issues to discuss, and the Bill will provide many opportunities to air them. Moreover, the subsequent Act will provide opportunities for piloting projects, to determine how the initiatives envisaged in the Bill work in practice. Those are some of the Bill's positive elements in dealing with a very difficult aspect of life.

Some of the Bill's provisions are long overdue. Others of its provisions—such as that on restorative justice for young people, developing ways in which they might make amends that go far beyond mere punishment—are novel and hopeful. They may just give us a profoundly better way of reducing offending by young people, while assisting young people's positive reintegration into their own community.

I worked in youth justice throughout the 1980s. Today, I heard Opposition Members, perhaps naturally, claim that all the Bill's good provisions were their idea. Although they would probably also claim that they had a good youth justice system in the 1980s, it did not seem like that from my perspective then. The policy framework within which we had to operate was a shambles.

I was trained in working with young people, at Lancaster university's centre for youth crime and community, explicitly to deal with offending behaviour, to manage youth justice systems and to develop non-custodial disposals—alternatives to custody. In 1983 and 1986, I established and managed two radical projects on alternatives to custody in Lancashire, and am still proud of the fact that we had some immediate success. In 1987 and most of 1988, no young people in the Lancaster and Wyre district were sent into custody, and we reduced the very serious offending of some extremely persistent young offenders.

I have also dealt with the issue of breach, and therefore accede to many of the statements made by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). Although breach was sometimes a very difficult matter to deal with within the culture of a social services department, it is an essential element of a radical community-based service.

Although it is an aside, I really should say that I am completely opposed to use of Home Office custody for children—which is not to denigrate the efforts of excellent and worthy people working with young people in prisons. It should be a fundamental principle that the very small proportion of young people who are a danger to others or to themselves should go to properly appointed, high-quality, small-scale and child-centred secure units operated entirely within the principles of the Children Act 1989. Recent scandals, such as those at Medway and Feltham, will recur until we get the matter right. I very much hope that part I will prove eventually to have been a very big step in the right direction.

Although we did some excellent work and made some real progress in youth justice work—that experience should never be discounted—we did not get very many things right. We did little to reduce youth crime overall. We did virtually nothing to reduce the serious impact of offending on individuals and entire communities. As the hon. Member for Ryedale said, we deliberately relied on other sentences—cautioning, cautioning-plus, conditional discharge, attendance centres, supervision orders, community service and all the rest of it—thereby causing incoherence in the system, difficulty in targeting interventions, and real difficulty in ensuring that young people got the same explicit, positive message.

We relied on those sentences partly because we knew that social work interventions do not always work, and certainly do not always work immediately. We were also very sceptical of the youth justice system, thinking it important to include in sentencing tariffs which might result in custody and recidivism as many non-custodial options as possible. Eventually, worthy aims led us into a rarefied form of social work that was sometimes out of touch with the community, wherein problems often arose.

Too often, family problems and behaviour patterns were compounded and entrenched before considerable resources and expertise were directed towards them. That is one of the real reasons why, as I said, I have changed my mind about the way we should operate youth justice. We have to address the practical issues in trying to deal with some of the problems that the previous system allowed to become very difficult and entrenched.

The system proposed in the Bill is greatly different from, and potentially so much better than, the previous one. It is founded upon the welcome innovation of youth offending teams—joined-up youth justice—that were pioneered partly by my colleagues in Lancaster after I worked there. The Bill explicitly aims to prevent offending by children and young people. It will introduce restorative justice for young people, properly facing them with the consequences of their behaviour, and then offering them a way back into the community. The new approach is fundamentally different from the old one.

With the greatest respect to the other place and to the hon. Member for Ryedale, I think that they missed the point on referral orders—which will offer a very early opportunity to begin an inquiry, and to establish, right from the start, that offending by young people is wrong, that it should not be tolerated, and that we should face it with all the resources at our disposal. In dealing with youth offending, we should seek imaginative solutions, and bring together not only all the statutory agencies but the whole community. It is essential that they be offered to the large majority of young people who will be

[Mr. Hilton Dawson]

appearing in court for the first time and pleading guilty, who will not be getting an absolute discharge and who will not be going into custody.

Soon after offending, young people will face a considerable intervention in their lives: a concerted investigation involving parents and other significant adults. Under the programme, young people will be challenged to make reparation to victims; to face the consequences of their actions; to work for the community; to break patterns of behaviour or friendship; to establish new patterns of behaviour or attendance; and to confront sometimes serious problems.

I have done some of that work before, although not all of it, and not at such an early and potentially significant stage. There has not been the opportunity to bring quite so many measures together in such explicit statutory guidance to young people. That is a powerful tool for working with young people. The Home Secretary is right to pilot the order and wise to allow himself the possibility of coming back to extend its range to other groups of young offenders. I hope that the Home Secretary will not be too quick to do the latter because there are major resource implications. A considerable proportion of the young offending population might be eligible for the programme. If experience in Scotland and New Zealand is anything to go by, the vast majority of those young people eventually will be available for such disposal.

The statutory attendance of at least one parent—and hopefully both—at the youth offending panel is crucial. It is vital that parents play their essential part in understanding their young person's criminal behaviour, dealing with it and being helped to deal with it. As I have suggested, I am concerned that clause 5 allows a loophole whereby courts might not require the parents of looked-after children to attend the youth offending panel that is inquiring into the criminal behaviour of their child.

Under the Children Act, at the very least, the mother retains parental responsibility, even if her child is subject to a care order. In reality, the vast majority of looked-after children are merely accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act at parental request and can be discharged from care at a moment's notice. Crucial Children Act concepts of parental responsibility and of local authorities having to work in partnership with parents are relevant here.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will look at the issues again to ensure that, where a child is looked after, both the parent and the representative of the local authority must attend the youth offending panel. The last parents who should be given an excuse not to come to the panel are parents who are having such great difficulty managing their children's behaviour that the children are looked after.

I have seen the suicide attempts of young people who have endured years of abuse, who have had their concepts of love and trust cruelly confused and undermined, who have found the courage eventually to disclose their plight to some adult who will listen, who have had their families reject them, their homes broken up and their education disrupted—only to find that the case collapsed when it came to court because of the often proper concern of adults that those children were too vulnerable to take on the experience of court.

There was concern that children would not be able to withstand the ordeal of living it all again in court in front of the person who abused them. I have seen the anger and despair of young people who know and regularly re-live every second of their abuse, yet who are made to feel as if they are disbelieved and as if they were responsible for what had been done to them. They are made to feel as if they contributed to their abuse and that they will be denied justice. They are made to feel utterly worthless and that no one cares, and that they might as well continue to put up with the perpetrator having their way with them.

I commend my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for proposing a Bill that defines children under 17 as eligible for assistance. The Bill proposes special measures on a statutory basis, such as screens; allowing a video interview to be shown as the witness's evidence; allowing a witness to give evidence from outside the court by a television link; clearing members of the press and public from the court so that evidence can be given in private; not wearing wigs and gowns; allowing a witness to be cross-examined on video before trial; allowing an approved intermediary to help a witness communicate; and allowing a witness to use communication aids. Those are vital measures.

The bones and the thrust of the Bill are excellent. It is sad that a great deal of the legislation could and should have been carried out in the wake of the Piggott report of 10 years ago, but the Government are showing themselves to be powerful protectors of children. I utterly support them in that.

2.57 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): It is always helpful to have hon. Members taking part in our debates who have recent practical experience of working in the areas concerned, and not just lawyers. *[Interruption.]* I hesitate to upset the Minister of State—who is a lawyer—before he replies to the debate.

Although the Bill has some points of controversy in it, its aims, purposes and philosophy are fully supported by my party and very much in line with what we have sought to do and with what we put before the electorate at the general election.

The first part of the Bill aims to create a more coherent and effective youth justice system. The second part aims to provide greater protection to witnesses and victims during court proceedings. Both those areas—as the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) said—have been neglected in recent years, and reform is very much needed.

The first part of the Bill proposes a new sentence for young people convicted for the first time; that is, referral to a youth offender panel. The panel will then agree a contract with the young offender which will be based on the principles of restorative justice. The meeting between the panel and the young offender will seek to involve the parents and, where agreed, the victim.

It has been Liberal Democrat policy for some time that the youth justice system in England and Wales should be reformed by building on the best practice of the Scottish hearings system, and on other overseas experience of restorative and hearings-based justice. We welcome, therefore, that part of the Bill.

We should be clear that this is not simply creating a new sentence for young offenders, but that it is the first step towards a new system of youth justice; a system that

seeks to confront more effectively young offenders with the consequences of their actions, while providing a more comprehensive response to their offending to stop them reoffending in future. The measure is the first step in that direction.

The evidence available suggests that a restorative approach improves the satisfaction of victims with the justice system. Despite the obvious difficulties for victims in coping with participating in a restorative system, the evidence that we have so far suggests that it is so much more satisfying to a victim than the traditional court system tends to be that, for many victims, it overcomes the initial apprehension that they might have about coming face to face with someone who committed the offence against them. Too often, victims feel ignored by proceedings in the courts. This system allows much a greater role and consideration of the victim's perspective.

Reoffending rates for young offenders are extremely high. The Audit Commission and others have reported how the youth justice system has stagnated, and I hope that the new approach will breathe some life into youth justice.

Too little is done to provide an effective response to young offenders that will address the causes of their behaviour, which is one of the elements of the contract. That is a key advantage that the Scottish hearings system has over the youth justice system in England and Wales, as I have seen for myself.

The Government have decided to focus their new approach on first-time offenders whose offences are not serious enough to make them eligible for a custodial sentence. We accept that there is merit in carefully and gradually introducing such an approach, but we very much hope that it will not be the end of the process. I hope that, on the evidence of success, the Government will be ready to extend the scope of those eligible for referral to a youth justice panel. The Bill gives the Secretary of State the power to do that and the intention is clearly that that power should be used.

My noble Friends referred to the make-up of youth offender panels and the question of discretion, which was the subject of a successful amendment in another place. We support the new referral order and the creation of youth offender panels and we want to ensure that they are widely used by the courts. We have always wanted to avoid the Government's being over-prescriptive towards the courts, so we are bound to have some sympathy with a power to exercise discretion.

The Bill may have defined too tightly who is eligible for a referral order, and seeks to impose a mandatory sentence, in effect, when that eligibility is established. We should look a little more carefully at those provisions.

Part II is designed to give greater protection to complainants and witnesses during court proceedings, thereby encouraging and enabling witnesses to give evidence that may lead to convictions. That is likely to improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, by making it less traumatic for individuals to help to bring the guilty to justice. We support the raw thrust of that part of the Bill, which correctly identifies an area that is in need of reform. Victims and witnesses are too often neglected and too little thought is given to their role in the criminal justice system.

Rape has been identified for some time as an area in which conviction rates have plummeted, but we should not forget that conviction rates in general have been falling over the past 15 years. At a time when recorded crime was rising year after year, not only conviction rates but the total number of convictions fell. Lord Warner referred to the worryingly low number of convictions for child abuse and other offences involving children.

One aspect of that downward trend may be the unease felt by many about giving evidence in criminal proceedings. It is bad enough to have gone through the trauma of the offence itself, and to submit oneself to legal proceedings that are traumatic in a different way is a pretty fearsome challenge for someone who has already had a harrowing experience.

It is important fully to maintain defendants' rights, but it should be made as comfortable as possible for complainants and witnesses to give evidence. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has done research that identifies the often traumatic nature of court proceedings for young children.

Chapter II of part II is designed to protect children and complainants in certain sexual offence trials from the traumatic experience of cross-examination by defendants in person. That provision is clearly directly inspired by the controversy that followed two rape cases in which individuals were subjected to prolonged and distressing cross-examination by—as it was proved—their attackers: the Milton Brown and Ralston Edwards cases.

In one case, the cross-examination went on for days, with the defendant wearing the clothes that he wore in the original attack.

Mr. Hogg: Does the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the second of the two cases that he mentioned went to appeal and that the Court of Appeal made it very plain that the trial judge has robust powers to prevent the humiliation and intimidation of the complainant by the defendant, and that those powers should be exercised?

Mr. Beith: That was indeed the background to the sentence that I was about to utter when the right hon. and learned Gentleman intervened. I was about to say that, although there has been progress in the courts since the two cases to which I referred, the fact remains that they have left a legacy of anxiety and fear among potential complainants about how they may be treated. It will take more than the advice from the Court of Appeal to overcome that, which is why the Government are right to legislate on the matter.

We concluded in our policy paper that the reform could be undertaken without jeopardising defendants' rights in any significant way or breaching the European convention. Obviously, the Government have reached the same conclusion. The important point is that defendants should retain the right to use cross-examination but must use legal representation if they want to exercise that option.

We concluded that the circumstances in which the defence in a sexual offence trial may use evidence of the complainant's sexual history need to be reformed. That is also the Government's purpose in chapter III. We welcome their aim of minimising the use of such evidence. The perception that rape victims will be subjected to a barrage of personal questions clearly deters individuals from seeking justice and from contemplating a trial.

[Mr. Beith]

In roughly half of rape cases permission is sought to bring in evidence of sexual history, and in 75 per cent. of those cases that permission is given. The law should be reformed so that such evidence is used only when it is absolutely relevant to the case.

Ms Drown: In what sort of cases does the right hon. Gentleman think that such evidence would be relevant?

Mr. Beith: One such possibility is specifically covered in the Bill. The immediate sexual history of the complainant in relation to the defendant could have some relevance—the Bill specifies a 24-hour limitation—when the issue at stake is whether the defendant could have had a reasonable belief in consent. It is a most difficult and contentious area, but we cannot exclude it wholly from consideration in a trial. If we did, as the Home Secretary said, we would risk making juries unwilling to convict, as it would be urged on them in the proceedings that they had not been able to consider that aspect.

It is arguable, although more questionable, that, if persistent rape accusations had been made by the complainant in comparable circumstances, all of which had been disproved, that might have a bearing on the case. The hon. Lady should be wary of attacking her friends on this issue, because it is certainly our view that there should be reform in the legislation to minimise the use of sexual history, which is so rarely relevant, in rape cases.

There could be a quid pro quo, so that, when evidence of the complainant's sexual history was allowed, the prosecution should be allowed to adduce evidence of the defendant's. That should certainly deter the unscrupulous use of sexual history by the defence in an attempt to excite hostility to the complainant among the jury. We will consider the Government's proposals during our further proceedings and we may table amendments to explore such possibilities.

We also want the Government to consider anonymity. Complainants in rape cases rightly have anonymity, which is critical in limiting intrusion into the alleged victim's life and in encouraging the reporting of crime. Consideration should also be given to granting anonymity to the defendant, as used to happen. The anonymity of the alleged victim can be completely undermined when the defendant is identified.

Because of the extremely grave social stigma of such cases, it can be argued that individuals should retain their anonymity while no case is proven. Reputations can be ruined merely by allegations, even when there is subsequent acquittal. Revelations about admitted sexual relations with the complainant may be damaging in themselves and would never have been made public but for the charge of which the defendant is acquitted. Even when the whole story is found to be false, people suffer from the claim that there is no smoke without fire. We have all heard that statement made, often in very unjust and inappropriate circumstances.

This is not a theoretical argument. Some individuals have committed or attempted suicide because of reports of the charges that have been made. We may never know whether they were innocent or guilty, but the knowledge that that pressure is there should be a warning to us. We therefore want the Government to consider further the idea of anonymity for the defendant unless and until a conviction is obtained.

Another aspect of the Bill that has excited controversy and been referred to by everyone who has spoken in the debate is the extension of reporting restrictions. Part II, chapter IV extends those restrictions with the aim of giving clearer protection to certain witnesses. Clause 43 extends current restrictions on the identification of alleged child and juvenile offenders and witnesses, and is to be applied before court proceedings start.

There has been some concern about that in the media. We understand and accept the aim of the clause, and recognise the fact that the Government have already attempted to tighten the provisions, but some criticisms are still being made and it is important that we get the rules right.

The most extreme example of the difficulties into which the media could be led is that of Dunblane. Once a school has been named, the anonymity of a child is at risk. Once that has happened, when a serious criminal offence is widely known to have taken place, it produces absurd stories in which the media can say only that something happened somewhere in Scotland. The way in which the media are expected to behave then enters a world of complete unreality.

The Government will have to consider carefully whether the provisions might have been drawn too widely. The Minister in another place gave an undertaking that the Government would be ready to consider any amendment consistent with the theme and philosophy of the Bill.

Mr. Straw *indicated assent.*

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Beith: There is a clear indication from the Government Front Bench that that is still so—and we shall certainly want to consider the provisions with care.

However, having expressed those qualifications, I strongly welcome the Bill and we enthusiastically support it.

3.11 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, as the Bill is of enormous relevance to my constituents, especially young people. I should declare an interest at the outset as an adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales.

My good friend the Secretary of State—I see that my right hon. Friend is just leaving the Chamber; goodbye. My right hon. Friend and other Ministers will be aware that the witness protection measures in the Bill were widely welcomed by the Police Federation annual conference, and that reflects the broad and sympathetic consensus in support of the Bill.

I shall focus on youth offending. During the short time that I have represented Don Valley, I have sought to get to know the work of the local police, the magistrates and the three prisons in my constituency, not least the Hatfield young offenders institution.

My first visit to a prison was to attend a lifers day, for 18 to 21-year-olds who had received a life sentence. It was an annual opportunity for their families to come to

an open day and talk with them, and the officers and other staff at the prison, about the regime and the young men's educational and vocational opportunities. I felt that it was a positive day, but I also came away feeling taken aback by the enormity of what had happened to those young men's lives.

Without generalising too much, I have to say that I am sure that, if I had looked deeply into the history of those young men and their involvement in crime, I could have seen the pattern that led to the violent episode that resulted in the life sentence. I hope that the work that the Government are doing to tackle early offending—the offending that often takes place in groups, and leads to violence later—will be effective, so that, in future, if I continue to represent Don Valley, I shall have to attend fewer such days.

Each of the bodies that I have mentioned has a contribution to make in curbing youth crime, and I hope that I will be able to illustrate that fact. I agree with the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway)—he has also left the Chamber; I do not know whether that has anything to do with my speech. He talked about the positive contribution that most young people in our islands make. It is important for us to illuminate that fact and talk about it, because debates about young people today tend to dwell on the negative. We should talk often about what young people do that is right, rather than what they do wrong.

In my experience—I am sure that every other hon. Member will agree—most young people in our constituencies are law abiding and see themselves more as victims of crime, who are sometimes intimidated out of using the services that are there for them. For example, they may not be able to go to the playgrounds, youth clubs or other places that they want to go to because a small minority intimidate them and prevent them from using the services.

When I held a surgery for children aged from 10 to 17 last year, it was interesting to hear how strong their views on law and order were, and what they would like the Government to do. That included raising to 18 the legal age for buying spray paints, because they were worried about vandalism. They also all felt that there should be compulsory identity cards. I pointed out the concerns that some people would have about that prospect, but their passion and their concern stemmed from their perception that their community was being ruined. They were also upset about being lumped together with those who caused the trouble. That is why they wanted to resort to such strict measures to tackle the problem.

Mine is a traditional Labour constituency. I do not know whether young people there would describe themselves as old Labour or new Labour, but they would certainly describe themselves as good citizens who want to try to make their community work. There are many talented, ambitious young people in Don Valley who make a useful contribution.

Doncaster boasts one of the highest proportions of children of school age who play football. We have a thriving voluntary sports sector and, like many former coal-mining communities, where brass bands were once commonplace, children are encouraged to learn an instrument at an early age, to take part in out-of-school activities and to join orchestras. Many schools in my constituency pride themselves on their sporting achievements, and on producing talented and rounded young people with real choices ahead of them. They can develop all those pursuits during their school lives and continue them into their adult lives.

I am pleased to share with the House the way in which the positive work of young people in my constituency is both celebrated and encouraged by the South Yorkshire police. I shall give two examples. When we debate how to tackle youth offending, it is important to show how the police can organise positive activities for young people.

First, there is the South Yorkshire police's Lifestyle project, which is run over the summer months. It encourages groups of young people, with an adult mentor, to establish a community programme that they organise and raise funds for themselves. At the end, there are prizes to celebrate their achievements.

Later this year, there will be Operation Cypriot, organised by Doncaster's B district police services. It centres round a youth convention being held in Rossington in my constituency, where young people will be invited to meet all the youth organisations—those involved with everything from roller hockey to chess clubs and dancing classes. All the children will receive a questionnaire about their activities and interests, asking how they would like to spend their leisure time and what facilities they would like.

To build on that initiative, the police are also seeking funding for a space for those young people. I understand that people are talking about a giant tent structure—that reminds me of the millennium dome. It would be a place where kids could hang out, relax and chat away from their parents—all young people want that opportunity—without causing a nuisance or having to spend lots of money.

It is in the context of wanting to see young people enjoy life, to prosper and to move on into adult life with confidence and real opportunities, that the Government, and certainly my hon. Friends and myself, are determined to try to stop youth crime. During the Tory years, some people said that young people committed crime because they had no hope or opportunity—as if that somehow partially explained or justified petty crime.

Lack of opportunities has something to do with the problem, but that is not a satisfactory excuse, not least because many children move from vandalism to theft and burglary at an early age. It is not uncommon to find children of 10, 11 or 12 who are practised burglars. We see those young people, who are often no more than children, making wrong choices that may mar their chances in life and leave them excluded from secure employment, stable relationships and the love and security that we all seek. That is why it is necessary, indeed essential, to divert children from anti-social and criminal behaviour at the earliest possible opportunity.

I am pleased to report favourably on the approach of the Rossington police to young people. The constables draw up a profile of the estates that they will patrol—a beat profile. They identify the schools, pubs and places in which children and young people congregate to cause a nuisance. Those areas are targeted for attention and incorporated in a clear strategy to tackle anti-social behaviour.

The previous Home Secretary talked about "walking with purpose", but the approach of the Rossington police is more policing with purpose—the directional policing

[Caroline Flint]

recommended by the Audit Commission. The use of local intelligence to anticipate problems, intervene and act strategically provides effective deterrence and value for money from my local police service. Using probationers from the tutor unit and special constables, the service mounts mobile operations targeting possible trouble spots, most recently in Wadworth and Edlington in my constituency, where groups of children cause a nuisance and are often in possession of alcohol.

The targeting of those groups serves to separate the followers from the hard core. Rossington police are keen to encourage parents to take greater responsibility for knowing the whereabouts of their children, and they have a policy of taking children home or writing to their parents about any activities that are anti-social. The letters that the police write to parents will soon be reinforced by overt video recording, so that parents can view the interaction between the young people and the police. That strategy is very much in line with the Government policy of nipping youth offending in the bud. Zero tolerance it may not be, but effective deterrence it certainly is.

The measures in the Bill will complement the establishment of the youth offending teams required by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. In tackling young people with problems that lead them into crime, each agency can focus on how its work can address those young people's problems, whether it be the education service addressing truancy and disaffection; the social services addressing problems in families; the health authority if young people have drug or psychological problems; and the police if the young people have already been involved in causing nuisance or petty crime.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Much of what the hon. Lady says is unexceptionable and will be endorsed by Conservative Members, but why is it justifiable for the Bill to circumscribe the power of magistrates and to render compulsory the referral of under 18-year-old first offenders to youth offender panels? Surely the judgment about whether a referral should take place should be a matter for the discretion of experienced magistrates, not the legislative fiat of this House.

Caroline Flint: I can comment only on the picture at the local level in my constituency. I visited the magistrates court the other week with my hon. Friend the Minister, and partnerships are already being created to work on fast-tracking cases and to develop the youth offending team. The magistrates see that as an opportunity to work with other agencies to ensure that the process is inclusive. My local magistrates welcome the Bill and see it as an opportunity, not a threat.

The establishment of the youth offending team allows agencies to see the whole picture and not just their aspect of it. The Doncaster youth offending team has 23 full-time staff, representing each of the agencies. They are located in one building and will begin their work in October, some six months ahead of the Government's required date. That blending of skills and expertise—including the courts, social services, police and schools—is a true partnership approach and is the way for the future. The traditional hierarchies, inter-agency rivalries and competing cultures must be replaced by learning and co-operation.

The new approach is also about value for money. There is no point in trying to re-invent the wheel by working separately instead of taking an agreed approach, and that point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). The role of Government has been decisive. It is not about meddling or creating bureaucracy, but about adding focus and strategy to ensure that resources are directed at specific social priorities. Government at its best is about rejuvenating the role of the public services working with young offenders, and the new approach will inspire innovation and good practice.

I mentioned earlier the fast-track measures that we are taking in Doncaster for adults and young offenders who plead guilty to minor offences. We are not a pilot area and the scheme has worked only because of the collaboration between the magistrates, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. My hon. Friend the Minister visited the magistrates court with me last week and we saw in action a turnaround of 48 hours, which does not allow young people to go out and commit other offences while they wait for their case to be considered. The scheme involves as few as six pieces of paper, which any police officer will welcome as reducing the amount of paperwork and the amount of time spent waiting around in court.

More importantly still, in the future, quick referrals will be able to be made to the youth panel to initiate a programme of action to tackle young people's offending. The Bill is a further step towards making such initiatives work and ensuring that they are holistic, solid and substantial. It is not a soft option to place people before a panel of specialists who can consider all aspects of offenders' lives, including their schooling, behaviour and family conditions. The programmes that the young people must follow will not be an easy option either.

Too often, young people go through the system and are given fines that they cannot pay. That is not a good use of our justice procedures or our time. A programme of activity, supervision, counselling and community service will meet the young people's needs and, as has been mentioned, satisfy many victims who do not feel that the justice system serves them. The new approach is about confronting young offenders with the consequences of their offending and reintegrating them into their neighbourhoods. I hope that it will be a valuable step towards halting the pattern of offending.

The team approach should promote good practice and widen the experience and options available. For example, Doncaster magistrates and police have developed a presentation for young offenders on the verge of a custodial sentence. The presentation is given by prison officers and police officers, and is known as "Prison? Me? No way!" It demonstrates the handcuffs that are used when offenders are marched from court to prison, and describes the routine of prison life and the risks to personal safety in prison. It involves taking the young offenders' fingerprints and taking them to the holding cells so that they feel what it is like to be locked up. The strategy is to lay bare the experience of being processed and detained. It underlines the gravity of their situation and is designed to jolt them into modifying their behaviour before the demonstration becomes a reality.

I said earlier that I have three prisons in my constituency. I have seen the stark reality of prison life for young men serving life sentences and for young men

serving their first custodial sentence in an open establishment. I recommend to every young person that they avoid that path at all costs. However, I have seen how Hatfield young offenders institution provides a service that reintegrates young people into the community. I would happily nominate the institution for a charter mark, because it is not just good, but an outstanding example of how to discipline, educate and rehabilitate young offenders. It is an open institution and, as one inmate described it to me, the rules are the bars. Each inmate holds the key to their cell, and violence and bullying are rare. If one asks any inmate to whom they would turn if they had a problem, the answer is any member of staff. The staff are caring and positive and exactly what we should expect from our Prison Service.

The challenge is far from simple. I asked the governor at Hatfield how many of the young men there were fathers and he said that the majority were. Those young men range in age from 18 to 21. If we do not tackle the issue of offending, we will affect not only those individuals, but the families that they create. Hatfield has taken a positive approach to that problem by operating parenting programmes to try to make a connection between the inmates, their role as fathers, and their children and partners or wives. That approach gives the inmates valuable skills to improve their chances of succeeding where they may have failed before. Places such as Hatfield have something to offer the youth offending teams and the youth referral procedure. They are at the sharp and most extreme end of our justice system, having to remotivate and re-engage such young men into the community. I hope that their experiences can be shared with all who seek to motivate those whose early disaffection leads them into petty crime.

I welcome the Bill, which is an important step forward. I hope that all will agree that we want to reduce the number of young people in custody but, to do so, we must start early, with meaning and purpose. The Bill is one part of the jigsaw that allows that to happen.

3.30 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I declare an interest as a criminal lawyer of some 23 years' standing, working as a solicitor and a barrister.

The Bill deals with some substantial and weighty areas of policy and criminal practice. This being a Second Reading debate, I shall confine myself to some snapshots of certain areas that cause me concern.

The first principle that one should enunciate in any justice system is that there should be a careful balance between the rights of witnesses and the rights of defendants. We must carefully guard against prejudicing the right of every individual to a fair, open and public trial. Equally, we must be mindful of the rights accorded to witnesses who, in effect, are also bona fide consumers of the criminal justice system that is available to us all.

Therefore, there is a genuine and widely held view that some of the Bill's provisions might undermine the right to a fair public trial. Despite the Home Secretary's certificate on the face of the Bill that, in his view, it accords with the convention on human rights, there are some problems that I hope that we shall be able to investigate further, possibly in Committee.

In opening the debate, the Home Secretary generously said that the Bill is not perfect and that any reasonable suggestion will be listened to carefully in due course. I respect him for saying that and I hope that that is the way in which my comments will be viewed by all in the Chamber.

I am sure that the Bill has many good points, but I honestly and sincerely believe that, in some areas, it comes close to breaching article 6 of the convention incorporated into the Human Rights Act 1998. In particular, article 6.1 states:

> "In the determination of his civil rights and obligations or of any criminal charge against him, everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Judgment shall be pronounced publicly but the press and public may be excluded from all or part of the trial in the interest of morals, public order or national security in a democratic society, where the interests of juveniles or the protection of the private life of the parties so require, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would prejudice the interests of justice."

Furthermore, article 6.3(d) states that a defendant has a right

> "to examine or have examined witnesses against him and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him".

That article is highly pertinent to major parts of the Bill.

I referred earlier in an intervention to clause 27, which advocates video recording of evidence in chief—that is pre-recordings. There are some safeguards in the Bill, but the clause appears to fly in the face of article 6. One has to wonder why the current common practice of live video link, which is prevalent in child cases in criminal courts, cannot be extended to this area in an effort, rightly, to minimise the trauma for witnesses.

Typically, in any child case nowadays in a criminal trial, the child will not be in the court. The evidence will be fed through a video link to the jury, judge and counsel. I see no reason why that cannot be applied in this instance. It ensures that the witness is outside the actual forum, but at the same time it is a live version of evidence which must always be preferred to any form of recording.

Mr. Hogg: It is not so much that it is live which means that it is preferable, but that it takes place after the material issues have been clarified in the course of the trial then taking place.

Mr. Llwyd: The right hon. and learned Gentleman made that point earlier, and he is right. For cross-examination to take place before a case is embarked on in the court process is rather unusual and unworkable. I defer to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's greater experience in this area, and I agree with him.

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): Does the hon. Gentleman also accept that, in cases in which a victim has allegedly been subjected to a traumatic violation, whether a child or an adult, it can be of benefit in enhancing the quality of such evidence for it to be recorded as soon as possible after the event, and that that is a positive attribute of video recording in such cases?

Mr. Llwyd: I hear what the hon. Lady says, and that also happens in child cases in criminal courts; she makes a valid point, but I was referring to the cross-examination of witnesses. However, I take her point and readily accept what she says.

[Mr. Llwyd]

It is important to note that one does not hear complaints about the way in which the system works in child cases, and they are often the most traumatic form of case, particularly when there has been sexual abuse and so on. The system seems to work fairly well. One does not hear of any complaints from witnesses, the courts or the defendants about the fairness of proceedings. I am sure that, in due course, those matters can be developed in constructive debates.

However, there is an area of concern. Nothing is more likely to test the veracity of any evidence than effective cross-examination. It is incumbent on all involved in any criminal process to bring out the truth and to ensure that justice is done. Therefore, to allow the cross-examination of a witness before a trial is completely different from anything that we have previously seen in the criminal process. Adequate and proper live cross-examination at the trial of a witness is highly necessary to bring out all the issues. I shall not labour that point; I have made it sufficiently.

The House of Commons research document states:

"Of the two possible benefits arising from introducing video pre-trial cross-examination, the working group considered that the main one was enabling the witness to give evidence away from the court room."

That can be done now, without the Bill, if the practice in respect of children giving evidence in a rape trial, or any other form of trial, is adopted. However, such matters can be debated more fully and minutely later.

With regard to complainants in proceedings relating to sexual offences, here again clause 33 could be in breach of article 6. I have no sympathy for any perpetrator of such offences, but surely the right to cross-examine a witness in person is vital to a defendant. We should not lose sight of the fact that, in England and Wales, a defendant is innocent until proven guilty.

The defendant should be entitled to conduct the defence in the manner in which he or she considers best with a minimum of interference. There may well be situations where, for example, the defendant is best placed to cross-examine, but I am not ignoring situations where clearly that can get out of hand—for example, where the complainant might have to relive in the cold light of day the horrible trauma of a sexual assault. I have every sympathy for anybody in that position and, as we know, there have been a few well-publicised cases of this nature. One can only imagine the torment of the complainant in those cases.

A balance needs to be struck. I question whether clause 33 is necessary. The matter was thoroughly examined by the Lord Chief Justice in the Court of Appeal in the case of Brown. In that case, the Lord Chief Justice endorsed the following criteria which he referred to from a previously reported case. He said:

"1 That the trial judge, without descending into the arena or acting on behalf of the defence, should ask such questions as he saw fit to test the reliability of prosecution witnesses;

2 That where appropriate the judge might ask the defendant whether there were matters he wished to be put to a witness, although it would be for the judge to decide whether and how such matters might be put;

3 That it was to be borne in mind that a heavy duty lay on the prosecution to be scrupulously fair as to how the case was presented so as to avoid any prejudice to the defendant.

4 That in summing up it was desirable to direct the jury that it was always open to a defendant to act in person but that where he chose to do so they should bear in mind the difficulty of his doing so properly;

5 A sensible course was for the judge to explain some or all such matters to the jury at the outset of the trial to enable them to understand the course which the trial followed."

The Lord Chief Justice went on:

"The trial judge was obliged to have regard not only to the need to ensure a fair trial for the defendant but also to the reasonable interests of other parties to the court process, particularly witnesses, and among those witnesses who were obliged to re-live, by describing, an ordeal to which they said they had been subjected.

It was the trial judge's clear duty to do all he could, consistently with giving the defendant a fair trial, to minimise the trauma suffered by other participants.

A trial was not fair if a defendant, by choosing to represent himself, gained the advantage he would not otherwise have had of abusing the rules in relation to relevance and repetition which applied when witnesses were questioned.

Judges did not lack power to protect witnesses and control questioning. The trial judge was the master of proceedings in his court."

That was what the Lord Chief Justice said directly on this point in the Brown case.

Mr. Dawson: Does the hon. Gentleman seriously imagine that a rape victim would carefully weigh the words of the Lord Chief Justice before appearing in court as a witness? Is it not more likely that they would be terrified at the thought that the trial judge would not be able to keep proper control of the proceedings, and that they would be abused and go through the whole process again?

Mr. Llwyd: None of us would want that to happen and I am not underplaying the trauma that any such person would face. With respect, the hon. Gentleman cannot base his arguments on an inability of the judiciary to get up to speed on that. I am sure that judges are attuned to the need for this provision. I practise in the criminal courts and I have not found any who are wholly unattuned to the subject, even though that is a recent pronouncement. I question whether we need this. It is a debating point. I am not saying that I am right, but I am trying to contribute to the debate. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says and I know that there is considerable force in it.

The Lord Chief Justice has gone further than that. He spoke on this subject in the other place and said:

"I have never suggested in this House or anywhere that the provision is contrary to the European convention. The argument of the noble Lord, Lord Lester, is one that I readily accept"

in other words, that there is a breach.

"But it is not so long since what gripped the popular press and rightly engaged the attention of your Lordships was the series of unjust convictions which were a blemish not simply on the criminal justice system but on our national life. This House must act at all costs to avert the risk of miscarriages of justice. It is for that reason that I, in company with the noble Baroness and the noble Lord, believe it to be urgently important that this provision shall not be brought into force unless and until it is clearly shown by practical experience to be needed."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 February 1999; Vol. 596, c. 1400-01.]

That opinion is supported by many legal practitioners on both sides in the other place.

Allied to those points is the apparent prohibition in clause 40 of cross-examination of a complainant about sexual behaviour. The 24-hour cut-off point appears to be

somewhat artificial. It is true that, often, cases turn on this and it can be highly relevant, even decisive, if one considers that the majority of sexual offences involve complainants and defendants who are known to each other. Many will have a relationship that may extend over a considerable time. The clause needs to be amended.

I question whether it would be appropriate to amend the clause to provide for a prohibition unless the prohibition would prejudice a fair trial of the accused or not be in the interests of justice. Such an amendment has been suggested by Liberty. I will not repeat the words of Baroness Mallalieu in the other place, but she made a compelling argument which totally undermines the need for this clause. Again, that is a matter for further debate.

Two further matters that concern me are the youth justice provisions and inferences drawn from an accused's silence. As we know, the old system of cautions for youth has been abolished. Earlier, I listened to the thoughtful, interesting speech of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) who, obviously, is an expert in this area. I accept what he says.

For some time, I practised in the juvenile courts. Often a youngster would be admonished while he chewed gum or laughed, knowing that nothing real could come of it in any event. Sometimes the young person concerned would have breached bail and perhaps broken into 12 or 15 cars the previous week even while on bail. Nothing could be done to redress the ever-descending spiral into criminality. The Bill provides a welcome step forward and it would be wrong of me to say otherwise.

There is now an attempt to tackle the root cause of the problem. It may be that the parents are not being supportive or that the young person is not being set any kind of example in life. Those and many other factors may be examined by the youth offending team under the regime suggested in the Bill. The provision is most welcome. Family group conferences in New Zealand and Australia, and Scottish children's hearings, about which we have heard at length today, contain useful tips on ways forward. I hope that that part of the Bill will come to fruition very shortly because there is nothing worse than seeing a young person on an inexorable slide into a wasteful and hopeless existence. I welcome the provision most sincerely.

We must not lose sight, however, of the main aim of ensuring that a young person gains better understanding of what society demands and how he or she plays his or her role in it. The framework—at least of the part of the Bill concerning youth justice—gives considerable cause for optimism, and I am encouraged by it.

As everybody knows, the European Court of Human Rights found against the Government in the case of John Murray *v.* the United Kingdom, which concerned inferences drawn from the silence of the accused. Drawing detrimental inferences from a failure to answer questions breached article 6 of the European convention on human rights given that Mr. Murray had no access to legal advice and assistance. I have no doubt that the Government should, in due course, look favourably on an amendment that ensures that inferences are drawn only if legal advice was available during, as well as before, an interview. I hope that such an amendment commends itself to the Government.

Substantial and important areas of the Bill ought to be improved. I am encouraged by the Home Secretary's comments on reasonable debate in Committee. Hopefully, areas of the Bill will be improved as a result. Problems with regard to article 6 will no doubt be debated fully. Of necessity, I have concentrated on my concerns. I do not wish to seem churlish; the Bill has many good parts. There is much common sense in it, and much to commend it. I hope that concerns can be addressed, because I, along with others, have very grave and sincerely held reservations about some parts of the Bill.

3.52 pm

Angela Smith (Basildon): I appreciate the opportunity to speak in this debate which, so far, has been very interesting. I am pleased to find widespread support across the Floor of the House for the principles behind the measures on youth justice. I shall address two areas. One is youth justice—I particularly support the proposals on restorative justice for young people—and the other is the proposed support for vulnerable witnesses.

Nowadays, there is far greater awareness of youth crime, and of the need for a far more intelligent and sustainable response and approach to reducing offending and re-offending. Unfortunately, such attention on youth crime brings with it a danger, as my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) has emphasised. As the degree of youth crime is brought home to people, there is a danger that everyone starts to think that all young people are involved in crime.

I have been greatly encouraged by the extent to which young people in my constituency are concerned about crime. I arranged a series of youth surgeries in which I met young people and addressed their concerns. At every surgery, young people themselves raised the issue of crime and youth crime. They feel that young people's reputation is being undermined by those who are involved in crime. We should be careful to acknowledge that young people may also be the greatest victims of crime. Indeed, many see themselves as victims and not perpetrators.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was an emphasis on reducing crime through harsher punishment. There seemed to be a belief that punishment was the best deterrent, and, the harder the punishment, the greater the deterrent, yet youth crime grew and there were fewer convictions—more crime, but more people getting away with it. Punishment is a deterrent to an extent, but certainly not on its own. It is clear that, when young people become involved in crime at an early age—often in the pre-teenage years—the surest and most effective way in which to encourage them away from crime is to intervene as soon as possible.

When I use the term "crime", I include what some people wrongly refer to as petty crime and vandalism, which has a great impact on people's lives. Reparation orders in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 aim to get those who offend to understand the consequences of their crimes and the impact that so-called petty crime and vandalism can have on its victims—whether individuals or communities.

Parts of my constituency—like those of all hon. Members—suffer badly from vandalism, but I am convinced that realising and appreciating the distress, hurt and anxiety caused would act as a deterrent. I am therefore pleased that the measures in clause 8 on youth offender contracts address the needs not only of offenders—in ensuring that they understand the consequences and impact of their action—but of victims.

[Angela Smith]

One measure in clause 8 establishes mediation sessions between the victim and the offender. We must accept that such sessions will not be suitable in all cases. I hope that the Minister will confirm that they will take place only with the consent of the victim. Other countries have used mediation with great success. Family conferencing in New Zealand has been mentioned. About 10 years ago, Germany and Austria introduced such sessions originally just for juveniles, but have extended the process to adults. The French Government are assessing how victims respond to mediation; the initial response is excellent.

We must never forget that victims' rights and needs should be addressed in their own right and not just as an adjunct to criminal justice policy. The proposed measures strike the right balance. In proposing any criminal justice policy, we must ask ourselves what victims want. I have spoken to a number of victims of crime, and it is clear that, whatever their views on criminal justice policy—they all want justice to be done and the offender to be caught—the most important thing to them is never to be a victim again. The emphasis on cutting re-offending, in this Bill and in the Crime and Disorder Act, is so important. I pay tribute to the Government's crime reduction programme, which considers repeat victims of crime and provides communities with resources to improve safety, advice and support to ensure that repeat victims do not continue to be so.

The proposed youth offender contracts take positive action to lead young people away from crime. Examples in the Bill include stopping young people associating with certain people and cutting truancy. That will not be that easy to enforce, as youth offender panel members will appreciate. A great deal of good will and work will be required of them.

I should like to quote a senior social worker, who spoke at a conference on restorative justice—at which I also spoke—during the passage of the Crime and Disorder Bill and following the publication of the White Paper. She said:

"This is the approach I've been waiting for all my professional life."

She is not a politician; she operates at the sharp end and knows how important it is to deter young people from committing crime. She is one of the people who will make this legislation work—and it must work.

One aspect of the proposed youth offender panels that is particularly welcome is the locking into the system of parents or guardians. A parent or guardian, or, if the young person is in care, a representative of the local authority, is required to be present in court. Will the Minister comment on the fact that, at the moment, far too many young people initially attend court without a parent or guardian, resulting in delay of the case until a responsible adult is present? What happens if the responsible adult or parent does not accept his or her responsibility to attend a youth offender panel? Can they be forced to attend, or will another responsible adult be appointed to do so? It will be very difficult to enforce a youth offender contract without the support of a parent or guardian.

I am not being picky about such an essential element of the Bill, but I am concerned at the small number of cases that could arise where a parent or guardian will not act responsibly because he or she is unwilling or unable to do so—which might be why the young person has offended in the first place. Young people whose parents are not able to take responsibility, for whatever reason, need even more support in turning away from crime than those whose parents are able and willing to do so.

I also welcome the measures to deal with vulnerable witnesses and victims of crime. Some time before I was elected as a Member of Parliament, I was marginally involved in the case of a young child who had been raped by a member of her family. It was an extremely distressing case, which brought home to me the inadequacies of the adversarial court system, especially for young witnesses and vulnerable witnesses.

I should inform the House that I am the vice-chair of the parliamentary Voice group. Hearing at meetings of that group adults with learning difficulties who have suffered abuse tell of their court experiences brings home to one how vital are the measures in the Bill to deal with this problem. I am sure that I do not need to give the House examples. It was extremely distressing for some of the people involved to report their case to Members of Parliament.

I am aware of cases in which vulnerable adults have been sexually abused and the case has not even reached court because the CPS has fears about how the victim will be treated and how he or she will react in the witness box. The system has to change, and the Bill goes a great way towards changing it. I commend my hon. Friend the Minister for introducing the proposals. Obviously, no one would argue for a reduction in the degree of proof needed for conviction, but the Bill addresses some of the issues surrounding vulnerable witnesses, and they are warmly welcomed.

I have raised with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in parliamentary questions the fact that there must be adequate training for all those working in the court system to ensure that they understand the needs of those with learning difficulties. I welcome those provisions in the Bill. They are, of necessity, very wide-ranging measures, and proper training will be essential.

I also welcome the humanisation—if there is such a word—of the courts. For many people—not only those with learning difficulties but children and those who are in court for the first time—the atmosphere and procedures can be daunting, intimidating and frightening. It may seem to some a minor matter that the court officials and the judge should remove their wigs and gowns, but I believe that that will assist many people in giving evidence, demystify the proceedings for those who are nervous and improve the quality of evidence in some cases. The fact remains that many victims and witnesses are far too frightened to give evidence. That fear allows criminals to get away with it. Anything that can be done to protect the witness or victim, while also protecting the right to a fair trial, must be done.

I should like to raise with the Minister a few concerns about the Bill. They are minor when compared to the scale of the improvements, but I ask my hon. Friend to consider them as further improvements or clarifications that can be made later in the passage of the Bill. I am not clear why special measures should be available to witnesses under 17 and not to witnesses under 18. I am also concerned that the way in which clause 16(1)(a) is drafted does not

clarify the Government's intent. It does not make it entirely clear that adults with moderate learning difficulties are included. I do not believe that it is the intention to exclude them and I shall be grateful if my hon. Friend will make that clear.

From my experience of talking to victims, it is clear to me that many rely heavily on their carers. Can we make it clear whether relatives and carers can support witnesses in court when expressing their own views, and when appropriate? An example was mentioned to me personally by a young adult in court. An individual's disability may extend to a speech impediment that can make it difficult for them to be understood by those who are not used to their speech. In that context, carers could assist the court and improve the quality of evidence.

I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that there is concern that the special measures available to the courts will be allowed only at the discretion of the court. I believe that the legislation is framed the right way round in that the court will have to apply not to use those measures, but my concern is that leaving it to the court's discretion could be a deterrent to some witnesses. Unless the witness has confidence that special measures will be available, they may be reluctant to come forward. In rape cases, for example, a defence lawyer may challenge a woman's right to such protection. Whether or not the lawyer is successful, women may not want to go to court—as often happens now—as they will remain unsure how they will be treated in court.

Ms Drown: One thing that the Home Office report "Speaking up for Justice" pointed out was that witnesses wanted certainty. Does my hon. Friend agree that only if protection can be provided automatically will that certainty be possible for witnesses?

Angela Smith: My hon. Friend reinforces the point that I have made and want to develop. Special measures such as screening the victim from the accused and giving evidence by video link—I would say that live video link was appropriate—and clearing the court while the victim gives evidence are all excellent in that they enhance the protection of the victim without being detrimental to the right of the accused to a fair trial. Will my hon. Friend the Minister consider the suggestion that those who report sexual offences could automatically receive the protection unless they did not want it? I fear that, without an automatic right, some women will be deterred from going to court—the very thing that the Bill is trying to avoid. The lack of an automatic right could also lead to different rights in different courts. Again, uncertainty about whether protection will be available could be a deterrent. Failing that, we need to give clear guidelines to courts so that women can be clearly assured that they will get protection. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) said, uncertainty may deter women from taking their case to court.

I greatly welcome clause 40, which restricts questioning about a victim's past sexual history. However, some concern remains about how such questioning could ever be relevant. The fact that the court has leave to allow such evidence to be submitted could also be a deterrent to being prepared to go to court. I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend's assurances on the matter earlier, but I am not sure that they went far enough to reassure all victims. If he will not consider that leave to allow such evidence should be omitted entirely, I hope that guidelines and strict instructions to the court will be made to protect victims.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) gave the example of previous allegations of rape made by the same alleged victim. I hazard that that is an issue not of sexual history but of criminal actions and criminal history, and that that would be appropriate to raise.

There can be no doubt that the Bill enhances youth justice and introduces many criminal evidence measures that will be warmly and widely welcomed. I have been surprised at the number of letters and telephone calls that I have had from constituents on this issue. The correspondence was warmly supportive of the Bill. As all hon. Members will know from going about their duties in their constituencies, it is with issues such as these that our constituents want the House to deal.

I believe that the Bill will lead to a far fairer system, improve access to justice for victims and address the central issue of getting young people away from crime. I welcome my right hon. Friend's comment that the Bill is good but not perfect. I think it is excellent, but I hope that we can see some improvement in it. I commend it.

4.7 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): It is a great pleasure to contribute to this debate on an important subject. Youth justice is a high priority for all political parties. If we do not get it right, the collateral damage to society can be tremendous. It is right that the focus of the Bill is on first-time offenders. It is a fact that 80 per cent. of people who commit offences do not do so again. Nevertheless, there is still substantial room for improvement. The measures to set up youth offender panels have to be welcomed, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) that the prescription that every young offender has to go through the procedure, bearing in mind the resource implications, needs to be looked at. In certain instances—my hon. Friend set out a number—it might not be appropriate to tie up resources on someone who has fallen into bad company and committed an offence but who has a good record, when the focusing of resources on other individuals would have a far greater effect.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale that the establishment of youth offender panels will be rather a long haul. We have pilot schemes and it will take quite a while to get the panels system up and running. There are serious resource implications, and I hope that the Government will address them.

The thinking behind youth offender panels is good. I know that there is something of a fashion for restorative justice, but it is in any case a good principle. John Braithwaite, an American criminologist, has written a number of books and articles on it. We have heard about the New Zealand experience, where people went back to the Maori inheritance to deal with youths. The Home Secretary mentioned the experience of Scottish children's panels. All those ideas can be adapted to our youth justice system. Making restitution to victims has to be a key factor, as has reintegration into a law-abiding society. The way in which many young people are brought up—unfortunately, many come from broken homes—means that it is important to reintegrate them into a law-abiding

[Mr. Robert Syms]

society. Taking responsibility for behaviour must be an important part of learning to lead a law-abiding life. All such approaches are to be commended.

I am extremely pleased about the measures to involve parents and keep them involved. That must be a key factor in ensuring that a young person who has gone off the straight and narrow returns to responsible life. Such involvement is also important for the parents; the most surprising thing about modern life is that, sometimes, parents are not aware of what their children are getting up to. In Dorset, we ran a scheme in which the police picked up young children carrying alcohol and took them back to their homes still carrying the alcohol. In that way, parents were made aware that their 13, 14 or 15-year-old child had been out drinking, sometimes having taken alcohol from their home. The scheme has been pretty successful because parents who think that their young child does no wrong have had to address the fact that their child was out—perhaps up to no good—mixing with others and drinking alcohol. That is one way of confronting parents and their involvement is most important.

Another important point is that the views of victims may be sought, although only with their approval. One of the weaknesses of our criminal justice system is that victims often feel totally uninvolved in what goes on after a crime and are sometimes surprised by the decisions of the Crown Prosecution Service. Under the measures in the Bill, if victims are amenable, they can give their opinions as to what happens to the young offender. That is important not only for the young individual, but for the victims, because they will have some involvement in what happens after what may have been a most traumatic event.

Young people are the key to achieving a law-abiding society, and any investment that we make will be well worth it; the savings will be phenomenal. There are many concerns in society. In 1992, when I was a prospective candidate in Walsall, North, one of the experiences that surprised me was that kids on a new estate were going round ringing the doorbells of elderly residents. Even at that level, great distress can be caused to elderly people. If we can catch people, especially at the time of their first offence, it will be a major improvement, provided that the response is not too prescriptive and that we put in enough resources to make the measures work. There is a degree of flexibility in the proposals for the orders—between three and 12 months—and that is to be welcomed. The conferences on progress are also welcome. A reasonable plan might be set out at the beginning of the process, but things might turn out differently. The fact that the referral order or contract can be varied is important.

The public must have confidence in our youth justice system, and I hope that the measure will assist in that. It is a key area for the future and I welcome the youth offender panels, but with the concerns that I have expressed.

I listened carefully when the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) expressed his concerns. I share the concerns about pre-recorded evidence; video conferencing links are good, and the fact that they are live is an important factor. I hope that the Home Secretary's earlier comments that he will be responsive to debates in Committee will apply to that matter; it is one that we must consider carefully.

In relation to cross-examination by unrepresented defendants, we heard of some appalling cases of witnesses being treated badly. However, I still have reservations about whether two or three extremely public and widely reported cases should mean that the rights of other people, some of whom may have cross-examined and been acquitted, should be trampled on. We are considering taking away the rights of defendants, and that needs careful examination.

Angela Smith: I accept the point made by the hon. Gentleman in relation to those two cases, and that we might be taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut. However, in those cases, the women who had been raped were cross-examined by their alleged rapists. Does he not accept that that is a deterrent to other women to report crime and go to court?

Mr. Syms: I accept what the hon. Lady says. They were appalling cases and no one would have any sympathy with what happened. However, there may be other means of controlling such matters. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy spoke about judges briefing juries on procedure, and that would be beneficial.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): In respect of the intervention by the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith), does my hon. Friend acknowledge that the Court of Appeal in the Ralston Edwards case made it clear that the judge had full power to take authority and to take command of such a situation so as to prevent the unacceptable treatment of a complainant? The Court of Appeal made a firm judgment after that very bad case.

Mr. Syms: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. The matter was certainly considered. Nevertheless, we must still be careful and the matter must be discussed in Committee. As has often been said in this debate, there are questions of balance. I have not come to a firm conclusion, but the matter must be tested in Committee. It is easy to use public examples of appalling cases to change the law and affect the rights of thousands of people about whom we never hear.

My final point is on press restrictions and clause 43. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) asked whether the blanket ban was overdoing it and whether such a ban conformed with the European convention on human rights. There are concerns about that blanket ban in Fleet street and it is another matter that must be considered in Committee.

I welcome most of what is in the Bill. We must test the proposition put forward earlier by the Home Secretary so that we ensure that the balance between the needs of victims and defendants is correct. I am sure that at the end of the process we shall make good progress and have a better Bill.

4.17 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I agree with my hon. Friends and with some other hon. Members that this is a fine Bill. I welcome it; I welcome the youth justice provisions, which follow up Labour's election pledge to deal effectively with persistent young offenders. It adds alternatives to custodial sentences to give such

young people future lives free from crime. The measures on witness protection are especially welcome; it is most important to convict the real criminals.

I want to concentrate my comments on sexual offences, especially rape cases, which are dealt with in the Bill. In 1992, I introduced the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill with the support of the organisation Women Against Rape. That Bill pressed for the wholesale reform of the rape laws and achieved some success. Following its introduction, case law made rape in marriage a crime; that had not been the case for centuries. That was welcome. Male rape was accepted as a criminal offence for the first time. However, many matters such as consent, or non-consent—especially in relation to rape—were not addressed. I welcome the fact that the Bill begins to address those matters.

Witness support for complainants in sexual offence trials is a welcome measure. Witnesses can be screened from the defendant; they can give evidence on live television link; or the court can be cleared while they give evidence. Unrepresented defendants will be banned from personally cross-examining complainants in sexual offence cases. The examples we heard showed that the victim relived the event; it was like a double rape because she had to endure the experience all over again.

The Government have made a laudable attempt to address the issue of the complainant's sexual history, to ensure that general allegations about the complainant's sexual history that are made purely to attack her credibility will no longer be allowed. The violence of rape is intolerable and is in no way mitigated by the victim's past sexual history—that has nothing to do with the violence that is rape. I note that the Government's "Speaking up for Justice" report, which was published last year, cited a study showing that judges allowed up to 75 per cent. of defence applications to question the victim about her sexual history in a way

"that seems to go far beyond that demanded in the interests of relevance and . . . fairness to the defendant."

That is a clear reason for action.

At this point, I wish to return to an issue that I raised in an intervention during the opening speech of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary—his assumption that there would be less chance of court prosecutions succeeding in rape cases than in cases relating to other offences. I do not understand why that is necessarily so. Already, the Crown Prosecution Service goes through such cases with a fine-tooth comb before they even get to court, and many cases that should reach court do not do so because of that practice. To assume that the cases are less likely to succeed in court is a double block on obtaining successful prosecutions. We need to challenge such basic assumptions, for they are one reason why only one in 200 rapists is ever convicted—a worrying statistic, which the justice system needs to address.

The loopholes in the Bill cause me concern, especially those concerning women's sexual history, such as the 24-hours provision, which relates to the complainant's relations with other men. In December, I wrote to the Minister of State on the subject of the consensual behaviour of the complainant with someone other than the accused, if it occurs within 24 hours of the alleged offence. I said that I acknowledged the purpose of the provision, but asked

"why should the complainant's sexual behaviour with someone other than the defendant in this time period be deemed to be relevant?"

In January, my hon. Friend replied, saying:

"The defendant may wish to say in his defence that he had consensual sex with the complainant shortly before or after the alleged rape and that the incident which the complainant now alleges was rape, was equally consensual."

I can understand that, but my hon. Friend went on to say:

"Or the defendant might have evidence which shows that the complainant had (consensual) sex with someone else shortly after the alleged rape. It would be wrong in the Government's view to prevent him from adducing evidence of this, or asking questions about it, in such circumstances."

I think that whether the complainant had sex with someone else is absolutely irrelevant. The issue on trial is what the accused did or did not do to her.

Mr. Hogg: Would not the hon. Gentleman concede that there are a number of cases where it might be relevant for the jury to know that the complainant is a person who is inclined to promiscuity? That can go to the question of consent.

Mr. Cohen: I do not agree with that. As I tried to establish through my 1992 Bill, the issue is purely one of whether consent is given or not given—if consent is not given, the act is rape. Whether or not the woman is promiscuous is irrelevant; if she has not given her consent, it is rape.

We must not accept the argument—and it should certainly not be used as a legal defence—that a woman having sex with another man, or even flirting with other man, somehow implies her consent to sex with the accused man. In Michigan in the United States, the law has been altered: except in cases where the identity of the accused is at issue, it allows evidence of sexual history only with the accused, but with no other man. I believe that that is the right way forward. In some cases, a jury needs to know if the victim and her alleged attacker have had a sexual relationship—it might explain how they came to be together on the occasion of the alleged rape—but questions about sex with other men are never relevant, serving only to demean and humiliate the victim, attack her character and divert attention from the facts of the rape. We should consider adopting the Michigan approach.

I am concerned that the Bill still allows legal credence to be given to an unreasonable belief on the part of the accused that consent had been given. In the other place, Lord Thomas of Gresford said that

"in almost every case where the defence is one of consent, there will be an additional defence that, even if the complainant did not consent, the defendant reasonably believed that she did consent. The two defences almost invariably run together."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 8 February 1999; Vol. 597, c. 51.]

Lord Goodhart said:

"English law has gone wrong in allowing unreasonable belief as a defence to a charge of rape."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 March 1999; Vol. 598, c. 1213.]

We should not give credence to an unreasonable belief.

The Government's women's unit wrote to Women Against Rape on that subject, saying that the Home Office view was that:

"For example, a defendant might claim that he believed the complainant was consenting because he had been told that she always kicked and screamed during sex. This would be relevant to his honest belief."

[Mr. Cohen]

That is not a reasonable view—it is the rough sex defence, which has been used repeatedly and quite unjustifiably in many rape cases. We know that a small minority of people engage in sado-masochistic practices, but it is dangerous to allow such a legal defence to be used in rape cases. The rough sex defence is only an easy excuse for non-consensual, violent rape.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if a woman decided that her best protection was to remain passive, she might be accused during the course of the trial of having consented, simply because she did not resist?

Mr. Cohen: That is a good point. That is why we have to come to terms with what does and does not constitute proper consent in such circumstances.

The other loophole that causes me concern is that defence barristers could still bring in evidence of behaviour "similar" to the woman's behaviour at the time of the alleged rape. That appears to give very wide scope—let me give one example. A complainant who goes to nightclubs regularly might be asked by a defence barrister whether she picks up men at those nightclubs and has sex with them. If she answers in the affirmative, that information could be used to justify the similar behaviour argument in the rape case. That is clearly unreasonable, and the clause concerns me.

It was suggested in another place that judges should give a mandatory warning that past consent with the accused does not imply consent every time. I think that that is the correct move. For example, in the case of rape in marriage, although consent would almost certainly have been given in the past, it does not mean that consent was given in the case of a brutal assault—and judges should make that point.

Ms Drown: I agree with my hon. Friend that accounts of the sexual history between the witness and the defendant should be limited. Does he accept also that sexual history is not always relevant? We cannot say that a husband can never rape a wife when we know that, unfortunately, that happens too frequently.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Although a couple may have had a mutual consenting relationship, it does not mean that rape cannot occur subsequently. We should not offer a legal defence to the opposite effect and I believe that we should consider introducing a mandatory judge's warning in such circumstances.

I think it is right to prevent the defendant from cross-examining the witness, as that is akin to a double rape. However, it is possible that defence barristers could be more aggressive, ruthless and clinical in cross-examination. We must address those issues in the law in order to protect the complainants—particularly the women—involved.

I have concentrated on the areas that require further consideration, but my criticisms do not detract from my earlier comments. This is a fine Bill in many respects and, like my colleagues, I welcome the Home Secretary's admission that he has an open mind when it comes to improving the legislation. I hope that he will consider some of my suggestions in that regard.

4.33 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I must declare an interest in the debate as I am a barrister practising in the criminal courts and may be involved in rape cases. I support the opening remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who said that this is an important Bill. It makes substantial changes to evidence in the criminal law, and I shall focus on that section of the Bill rather than on the first part.

I must make a general point in response partly to the comments of the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) and partly to the remarks of the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith). I listened to their contributions, and I got the impression that they were inclined to lose sight of a very important fact: the House must safeguard the interests of defendants. It is perfectly true that we must ensure that witnesses and complainants are not subjected to greater trauma than need be. Obviously, it is a disagreeable experience to appear in court, to give evidence and to be cross-examined and one does not want to make that still more difficult. We also have a public interest in ensuring that complainants come forward, for all the reasons that hon. Members have advanced.

However, at the end of the day, the most important person in a criminal case is the defendant—especially when he is facing a serious charge such as rape and when, if found guilty, he will probably be sent to prison for a long time. The House must be sure that nothing that we do to address the legitimate concerns of complainants or witnesses detracts from the fairness of a trial. That general point underpins the particular issues that I shall raise.

I oppose the prohibition, in clause 33, of a defendant's ability to cross-examine in cases involving sexual offences. We must recognise that the situation contemplated seldom arises. That is not surprising, as most defendants choose to take advantage of legal aid, which is generally available. Most defendants assume—probably correctly—that a lawyer will do a better job than they would. However, a number of defendants, although not many, who do not like lawyers—I am not particularly critical of them for that—or who conclude that they would do a better job than a possible representative choose to conduct their own cases. In the great generality of criminal cases—there are one or two exceptions—a defendant has that right, and we should be very slow in a democracy to deny a defendant the right to conduct his own case. We should do so only if there is an absolutely compelling reason to justify that decision.

At the same time, we must be conscious of the possibility of abuse. We must recognise that abuse has occurred in the criminal courts. The Home Secretary—or perhaps the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)—referred to the cases of Ralston Edwards and Milton Brown. However, the fact that only two cases are in hon. Members' minds, emphasises the rarity of such abuses. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) and other hon. Members pointed out, the case involving Milton Brown went to appeal and the Court of Appeal spelt out the powers of the trial judge. The trial judge has a robust power, which he or she is encouraged

to use, to intervene in order to prevent an improper exercise of the right of cross-examination by the defendant.

The Court of Appeal heard that case in May 1998 and, so far as I am aware, there have been no further cases of oppressive cross-examination by defendants. I think that it is premature to conclude that the Court of Appeal's advice to trial judges is not effective. Therefore, I conclude that it is wrong at present to remove from the defendant the right to cross-examine in sexual offence cases. I might come to such a view in the future if trial judges do not heed the advice of the Court of Appeal, but I believe that they probably will do so.

Mr. Leigh: It is not just a matter of defendants—who face possibly 10 years in jail—having an ancient right to cross-examine their accusers. Will my right hon. and learned Friend comment on the point made in another place that there are many more acquittals in rape cases these days because there are many more prosecutions for marital or date rape? In those circumstances, a defendant may have perfectly good reasons for wanting to cross-examine the complainant and put his case directly to his ex-wife or ex-girl friend.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is probably right. Consent is the difficulty in cases of date rape or rape within marriage. When a consent has undoubtedly been given on previous occasions, it will take a great deal to persuade a jury that the consent has been withdrawn. Therefore, I agree with both parts of my hon. Friend's intervention.

I revert to the point that I had in mind on clause 33. The Home Secretary made the point—I understand it entirely—that the court has the power to appoint a legal representative to cross-examine on behalf of the defendant thus disfranchised. However, I do not regard that as a sufficient solution. To start with, a defendant who has been obdurate on the appointment of a legal representative in the first instance may well not be very co-operative when it comes to giving instructions to the legal representative who has been appointed by the court. In parenthesis, we need to keep in mind that the Bill provides in terms that the legal representative is not responsible to the defendant. That is the language of the Bill.

We may well find that the defendant will not give instructions—*[Interruption.]* The Minister of State shrugs, but he should not. The idea that the legal representative can necessarily gain a proper sense of the defence from the papers is an illusion. That is especially the situation if the defendant has declined to answer questions during the interview process, as might well be the case. I am sure that that is within the knowledge of the Minister of State, and certainly it is within mine. In that event, the legal representative instructed by the court on behalf of the defendant will not be able to put the case with any degree of clarity.

If we deny to the defendant the right to cross-examine in those cases, we are creating the risk of unfair convictions.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is making an extensive case for cross-examination and self-representation. Does he accept that, in certain cases involving criminal sexual activity—especially incest, including the sexual violation of daughters—the right of self-representation does not exist? The Bill will merely extend that practice.

Mr. Hogg: It will more than extend it because the Bill would extend it dramatically. The hon. Lady is right to say that there are some cases where the right of self-representation is restricted. However, we are thinking about a dramatic extension of that practice. That applies to clause 33 and 34. The reservations that I have expressed about clause 33 extend inevitably to the process that is contemplated in clause 34, which is to build on the precedent referred to by the hon. Lady and to extend it very much further. I am against the prohibition to which I have referred.

Ms Beverley Hughes: I accept that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is raising some valid issues that are difficult to weigh in the balance. In trying to weigh those issues, will he accept that the main function of the court is to establish the truth and to administer justice? If the ability of a witness and a victim to tell the truth and to give full evidence in court is jeopardised by being cross-examined by her alleged assailant, that is of essential interest to the court and should carry more weight than at present the right hon. and learned Gentleman is giving to it.

Mr. Hogg: The answer to the hon. Lady's question is that I do not agree with the underlying assumption. The purpose of a criminal court is to ensure a fair trial, which is not quite the same as trying to determine the truth. The process of a criminal court is to ensure that a defendant is not convicted unless the case is proved beyond a reasonable doubt. That is slightly different from the process of determining the truth. In one sense, the phrase "the process of determining the truth" is more akin to the civil standard of proof—on the balance of probabilities—than the criminal standard. I return to the point that the purpose of the criminal court is to ensure that the defendant receives a fair trial, by which I mean that the defendant is not convicted unless the case is proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

I move on to the clause 40 point. I do not support the proposal that would restrict the ability of legal representatives to cross-examine the complainant about sexual behaviour. On that point, I disagree with the hon. Members for Basildon and for Leyton and Wanstead. We need to keep in mind that there is already a restriction within the criminal law that is imposed by section 2 of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976. In effect, that restriction prevents, without the leave of the judge, examination or cross-examination of the complainant as to sexual behaviour other than with the defendant. I believe that it is not necessary to extend the existing law or, to put it differently, I do not believe that the case has been made out.

The plain fact, distasteful though it may be, is that; in certain cases, it is both relevant and necessary for the purposes of a fair trial to cross-examine a woman about her sexual background. As one who has had to do it, I can say that it is a very distasteful exercise. It is not something that most advocates embark on lightly. It is an extremely distasteful exercise, most of all for the complainant but also for the advocate, at least for an advocate of any sensitivity. However, there are cases where sexual behaviour is relevant—for example, cases involving consent.

[Mr. Hogg]

I disagree with the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead. If a complainant has a propensity to promiscuous behaviour, that fact may be relevant to the question of consent. Not only may it be relevant to consent, it may be a matter that should be before the jury. The same consideration incidentally applies to a propensity to particular sexual practices. That, too, can be relevant as to whether the prosecution has proved lack of consent.

Ms Beverley Hughes: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mrs. Gorman: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Hogg: I shall give way to both hon. Ladies. First, however, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes).

Ms Hughes: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman define promiscuous? Is there an absolute definition? If so, how should it be interpreted?

Mr. Hogg: If the evidence is that, in a particular case, the complainant in a casual way agreed to sex and there was evidence that, on many other occasions, she was inclined to do that with people she did not know well, that is a fact that should be before the jury. The jury might well conclude that, in the particular case, that is what happened.

Mrs. Gorman: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, in other criminal prosecutions—for example, for assault or burglary—the crime of which the defendant is accused is dealt with in its own right? It is not linked to the history of the individual. Other aspects of his conduct are revealed only after sentence has been passed. Why, then, is a woman's history relevant to the case in point?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is muddling two principles. I am sorry to say that, as I do not wish to be unfair to her. She is speaking about the position of the defendant. As a general proposition, the antecedents of a defendant cannot be brought before a court, but as a general proposition, the antecedents of a witness other than the defendant can. The exception that is being argued for is an exception in favour of the complainant in sexual offences cases, which would take them out of the general pattern of the criminal law.

I have been arguing that there are cases involving consent where previous conduct is material, but there may also be other kinds of cases where it is material. For example, in a case where the complainant has undoubtedly had sexual intercourse within the relevant time frame and where there is forensic evidence to substantiate that, but the defendant asserts that it was not him but somebody else who had sexual contact, it must be right to be able to adduce evidence by cross-examination or otherwise to support that assertion. I accept that the Bill does not positively prevent that, but it makes it substantially more difficult.

Mr. Boateng *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hogg: The Minister of State shakes his head and I disagree with him. The measure adds to the present law and makes that more difficult.

Mr. Boateng: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain how the issue of promiscuity is relevant to consent? Is he saying seriously to the House in this day and age that someone who is promiscuous does not have the right to say no?

Mr. Hogg: As the Minister has some difficulty in accepting the proposition from me, perhaps he will accept it from the Lord Chief Justice. I quote from the Second Reading debate in the other place, in which the Lord Chief Justice said:

"The simple truth is that on an issue of whether a complainant consented to sexual relations with the defendant, the fact that the complainant has behaved promiscuously on other occasions outside the window of 24 hours before and after the commission of the offence may well—I emphasise 'may well'—be relevant."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 15 December 1998; Vol. 595, c. 1272.]

That is all that I am saying, and those are the words of no less a person than the Lord Chief Justice when the matter was debated in the other place, so the Minister had better be a bit chary of dismissing those views with the alacrity that he has shown.

I shall touch on two other points which both relate to part II. Again, I make the point that the purpose of the criminal law is to be fair to defendants. We are in the business of ensuring that defendants get a fair trial. We must be extremely cautious before the House lends itself to a process that undermines the fairness of a trial.

I want to say a word about special measures and eligible witnesses. I understand full well the Government's concern—not an unworthy concern—to ensure that eligible witnesses as defined in the Bill can, in certain circumstances, receive special protection. I disagree with the hon. Member for Basildon who suggested that that should always be made available. On any view, it should be a matter for the discretion of the trial judge.

We should understand that special measures—for example, the erection of screens or an order requiring the court to be emptied can work to the prejudice of a defendant. Such orders can create an atmosphere that is prejudicial to the defence, because, by implication, they suggest to the jury that there is a risk of intimidation.

Video links are another example. I am not against all video links; there are cases in which they are appropriate. In many cases, however, they are not helpful. The immediacy of direct cross-examination is lacking. Hon. Members have only to reflect on how they watch the proceedings of the House on the television screens in their offices, and they will know that that lacks immediacy. Moreover, once the principle of video links is established, that emphasises the vulnerability or the sensitivity of the complainant or the witness. That may be appropriate in some cases, but we must not lose sight of the fact that the measures can work to the prejudice of a fair trial of the defendant.

I am not saying that we should not have the special measures; I am saying that, in Committee, that part of the Bill needs to be looked at critically from the perspective of the defendant. The Committee should ask itself whether the criteria should be more rigorously defined and whether the presumptions should be tilted against the party that makes the application for the special measures direction.

On video-recording of cross-examination, by definition, that cross-examination takes place before the trial. We are not talking about cross-examination through a live line, which the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) mentioned, which is also the subject of a special measures direction, but is different from what I talk about now.

It is a small point, but I hope that the House will keep it in mind. The Bill contemplates the possibility of cross-examination by a person other than the legal representative of the defendant. On the face of it, I find that difficult to countenance. The following point is much more important. I am glad to see that the Home Secretary is now present. It is always nice to see him, but it is particularly nice at this point. I was talking about cross-examination on a video before the trial, the point on which I intervened during his speech.

In principle, I am against that for the following reason. Until a case is under way, one has heard the evidence and seen the parties, it is extraordinarily difficult to be absolutely certain what the issues will be. The Home Secretary referred, fairly, to primary and secondary disclosure. That will sometimes make clear the relevant issues, but it will by no means always do so. I have been involved in many a case where I thought that point A would be the bull point, but it turned out to be largely irrelevant and what mattered was a different point. In the great majority of cases, that fact does not become apparent until the case has got under way and has been going for a while.

I accept that there are provisions in the Bill that enable further cross-examination to take place, but, as the Minister is aware, the criteria for allowing that further cross-examination is very tightly defined. There is no need for the provision, especially as there is the proviso in favour of the live link. It is positively undesirable. I hope that, in Committee, the provision will be struck out.

I am conscious that I have occupied more of the House's time than I had wished. I fear that, in their concern to protect complainants and witnesses—a wholly legitimate concern—the Government run the risk of undermining the fairness of our criminal system. Some parts of the Bill—certainly those to which I have drawn attention—are likely to prejudice a fair trial. I hope that those matters will be carefully considered in Committee. If the Bill is not changed in Committee, I hope that the Conservative party will have the courage to vote against it on Third Reading.

4.59 pm

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): I support the Bill in its entirety. I should like to speak on many of its aspects, but I intend to restrict my remarks to part II.

In recent speeches today, some of the critical issues and underlying principles that may divide hon. Members have been raised. The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) identified some of them. I am familiar with the problems of child sexual abuse, which I shall use as an example to draw out some of the important underlying principles of the Bill.

We have heard a great deal about the need to balance the rights of defendants to a fair trial with the needs of victims to put their evidence before the court. That is a valid and complex issue and the balance is not easy to strike. I should like in this context to respond to some of the points made by Opposition Members. What do we mean by a fair trial for defendants? Should they have free rein in court to cross-examine? If the traditional conventions of the courts do not enable an accuser to give the fullest and clearest possible evidence, we cannot say the trial is fair for the defendant or the victim.

Mr. Llwyd: The Lord Chief Justice has pronounced on the issue and the jury is out. I believe that there is some consensus. Judges must take heed of what the Lord Chief Justice has said and must observe every aspect of the guidelines very carefully. If they do, there will be no problem of witnesses being intimidated, because the cross-examination will be stopped. That provides equal protection for witnesses and the rights of the defendant.

Ms Hughes: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says and I know that he has considerable experience. However, his view is predicated on the assumption that judges will implement what the Lord Chief Justice has said in the way that is envisaged. Judges already have limited provisions to enable children to give evidence more effectively, but they have not been used in child sexual abuse cases to the extent that the cases have demanded. It is legitimate to raise questions about the perspectives that prevail in courtrooms among lawyers and judges, and to consider to what extent we can be assured that the necessary actions will be taken without legislation.

Mr. Leigh: I know that I am not going to convince the hon. Lady, because she thinks that there should be a blanket denial of the right of the accused to cross-examine in a rape case, but does she think that there may be exceptional circumstances in which, by leave of the court—and only by leave of the court—the accused should be allowed to cross-examine the complainant? For example, if she is an ex-girlfriend, should he not be entitled to ask her why, in his view, she is telling lies?

Ms Hughes: I cannot envisage such circumstances, so I guess that the hon. Gentleman is right to say that I have a different opinion from his on the general principle.

In the criminal justice system, those parts of the process of investigating and protecting children that have to do with prosecution have failed the victims of child sexual abuse and their families. The incidence and prevalence of the offence is much greater than the public appreciate. That is largely because only a small number of such cases reach court and only a small number of those that reach court result in a successful prosecution.

We have made considerable progress in the processes of protecting children when an allegation has been made, and in the multi-disciplinary process of investigation. However, we have not made similar progress in the criminal justice system—in how it decides whether to prosecute such cases, and in how those prosecutions are executed.

[Ms Hughes]

The advisory committee on video-recorded evidence, which produced the Piggott report in 1989, not only made a raft of recommendations—which have largely been incorporated into the Bill—on dealing with child witnesses, but identified one of the main reasons for the lack of progress in the criminal justice system. The committee believed that lawyers' and judges' perception of, and attitude towards, children's evidence was such that that evidence was not taken sufficiently seriously, and that legal processes have been very slow in adapting to the specific needs of children and of children who have been violated.

In a previous professional capacity, I undertook some research with a small team investigating the nature and incidence across the country of ritual and organised child sexual abuse. As part of the research, we had to examine police and social service records of their investigations of about 20,000 cases of alleged child sexual abuse, which entailed reading the transcripts of children's statements. It was a harrowing experience for my research team. However, even more harrowing was our realisation, after following up those cases, that fewer than 5 per cent. of the cases ended up in court, and that a very tiny percentage of them resulted in a successful prosecution.

I appreciate the views of experienced lawyers who express in the Chamber their concerns for defendants. However, I feel very strongly that, as parliamentarians, we must deal with a wider issue of justice that becomes acutely obvious in cases of child sexual abuse. The figures themselves show that our criminal justice system is allowing most alleged perpetrators to walk free and abuse again. We, as parliamentarians, must therefore ask ourselves whether the criminal justice system is serving the interests of children and of justice. I argue very strongly that, on the basis of the evidence in child sexual abuse cases, the answer is clearly no.

I therefore believe that, as responsible parliamentarians, we have a duty to change the system, while accepting the difficult balances that have to be struck. I accept that it is very easy to make an allegation of a sexual offence, and that it is very important that a defendant should be able to try to defend himself or, occasionally, herself. Equally, we have to recognise that, so far, the balance in cases of child sexual abuse has been tipped strongly in favour of the defendant, and insufficiently in favour of protecting children by the successful prosecution of offenders.

The nature of the issue is evidenced also by the very large number of allegations of child sexual abuse that have been fully investigated—they are not frivolous—and have resulted in prosecutions, but that have been discontinued in court. Furthermore—going back a stage—a high proportion of cases never even reached court, as Crown Prosecution Service solicitors decided that, evidentially, a case would not stand up.

The issue brings us to the heart of some of the Bill's provisions. We have to find ways of enabling children to tell their story to a court in a way that will increase the chances of—on my definition—a fair trial. A trial has patently been unfair if a child cannot provide to the court the fullest and most detailed evidence that he or she is able to give within his or her limitations. I therefore very strongly support the Bill's provision of special measures and eligibility criteria, which will be an essential and fundamental step forward if we really are going to tackle the issue.

It is not only a question of justice for individual children, important though that is. As a society, if we are going to take more seriously the larger issue of child sexual abuse, not only do we have to be effective in protecting children and investigating allegations, but the prosecution process has to be more effective as part of the armoury against such abuse as a social problem.

I support the measures. However, although they are important, they are only a necessary condition for more effective prosecution; they are not, of themselves, a sufficient condition. That is because the measures will be effective only in so far as we can begin to change the attitude of Crown prosecution solicitors and of judges, who must show themselves more disposed to use the measures, to begin to change the culture in court, and to make it easier for children to give their evidence in the interests of a fair and just system.

5.10 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I apologise to the House for the fact that other parliamentary business kept me out of the Chamber for part of the debate, although I have heard much of it.

I wish to refer to a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) on youth offender panels. If we are going down that road, it is extraordinary that the conditions of panels will apply only to first-time offenders. As with any law, it will not be retrospective. However, there will be a cut-off point, so that anyone who may have offended in a minor way before the introduction of the legislation will, effectively, fall outside the net.

I am working on the fond assumption that that will not be by any means a licence for the Bench to release back into the community, against the public interest, young people who more properly ought to be dealt with more severely because of the severity of their crimes. Clearly, that would not be progress.

If the proposal is a good thing—and I take it that most hon. Members believe that, in theory, it is—it surely should be extended to second and even third-time offenders on appropriate occasions, as determined by the Bench. The thrust of the measure is to try to keep very young offenders away from a life of almost institutionalised criminality. If that is to work, the Home Secretary and the Minister of State must look again at this matter in Committee.

I wish to refer to the provisions in the Bill that relate to sexual offences. I am concerned that, once again, the law of unintended consequences may cut in if we are not careful. I listened with great interest and respect to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), who, as a distinguished lawyer, knows much more about these issues than I do. My experience is quite simply as a constituency Member of Parliament and my offering is anecdotal rather than legal and experienced, as my right hon. and learned Friend's was.

I wish to give two examples to illustrate my point of view. The first relates directly to my family. When my daughter was small, her aunt—who was then also in her teens—was attacked by two men on holiday at night while

leaving a club. She was jumped from behind, strangled, raped and left for dead. Miraculously, she recovered, and I saw her two days after the attack. The bruises on her neck were still vivid, and every single blood vessel in both eyes had burst; her eyes were bright red, as a result of the ferocity of the attack. No one who has experienced that kind of aftermath—and the internal trauma that goes with it—can possibly believe anything other than that rape is a vile crime.

However, one of my first duties as a Member of Parliament following my election in 1983 was to see, at their request, the young wife and mother-in-law of a young man who was detained in Canterbury prison, having been convicted of a rape. They both pleaded his innocence. One might have thought that a mother-in-law would feel quite strongly about a son-in-law who had acknowledged that he had gone out to a nightclub and made love to a woman who was not his wife.

Both ladies convinced me that I should go and see my constituent in Canterbury prison. It was the very first time I had been inside a prison. It perfectly likely that most Members of Parliament, when first elected, will not have had occasion to go into a prison. It is a fairly daunting experience and not one that I would want to repeat, except to visit constituents.

I interviewed my constituent in prison for about an hour and a half and came away with a feeling of grave disquiet. On my way out, the warden said, "Can you do anything for him, Sir?" I asked why and he said, "Because he shouldn't be in here. He is not guilty." Prison wardens are not given to believing that all their charges are innocent.

Prisoners take a fairly robust view of those who are guilty of sexual crimes, especially against women and children, which they find offensive, as we all do. My constituent had never been on rule 43 for his own protection, because everybody in the prison believed that he was innocent. I took up the case and discovered that not only the warden and I but the probation officer were convinced that it was a genuine and serious wrongful conviction. That was 15 years ago, and I am still fighting the case.

It is virtually impossible to get the conviction reversed. The case is currently before the review committee, which is deeply reluctant to reintervene because, frankly, most people recognise that there is very little mileage in being dubbed a defender of rapists. That does not alter the fact that a significant number of people who have been closely involved with the case and have examined the forensic evidence, or lack of it, and seen the clothing that was indubitably tampered with after the forensic scientists had examined it, believe that the man is innocent.

Happily, my constituent's wife stood by him—he now has two fine children and is trying desperately to rebuild his life—but the conviction has stuck with him. Why am I saying all this to the House? Because the demure young lady who appeared in court was not quite the same young lady whom others had seen on the streets of my constituency, enjoying herself in a variety of ways at a variety of times of the day and night. I put it no higher than that. To say that such a person's sexual history could not or should not be allowed as evidence in any future case would, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham said, prejudice the course of justice.

I am deeply concerned that there is an atmosphere abroad that militates against the defendant and virtually says that the moment a man is in the dock accused of rape he is guilty, and the complainant is automatically a victim. In many vile cases that is so, but not in every case. Members of the Standing Committee should satisfy themselves and the House that, in doing what, in broad terms, we all want done, we are not damaging what my right hon. and learned Friend rightly described as the absolute duty of the court to ensure that the defendant gets a fair trial.

The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes) rightly drew attention to the problem of child sexual abuse. There is another case in my constituency in which we believe that a very young child has been abused. The Crown Prosecution Service cannot proceed with the case because of the child's age, which is under five. That almost inevitably means that the abuser, if that is what the person in question is, will go free.

I urge those who serve on the Standing Committee—I will not, because I will be serving on another—to study the matter extremely carefully and consider giving the courts and the CPS wider powers to use discretion, rather than just assuming that, because a child is below a certain age, he or she cannot give evidence. I believe that, if the Committee can do that, and pay attention to the other issues that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have raised, it will come back with a Bill that we shall all be able to support on Third Reading.

5.20 pm

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I hope that the House will accept my apologies for the fact that I could not be present at the beginning of the debate, because of unexpected parliamentary business. I have been impressed by the quality and thoughtfulness of that part of the debate that I have been privileged to attend, and it is with some trepidation that I stand up to speak. I know that, as has been said already, the Bill has been comprehensively discussed in another place by many honourable and very learned members of the legal profession, who have raised many important legal points. I shall not cover those myself, largely because I have no legal background.

What I have to say derives primarily from my keen interest in the work of the youth justice system in Luton, where we are testing a youth justice pilot, and from my experience of working with women and children who have been subject to violence and abuse. I am proud to have had the opportunity to meet and talk to the representatives of Victim Support, and to have seen the excellent and valuable work of the Luton witness protection scheme.

I have also seen some of the pioneering work that was the precursor to the youth justice pilot scheme that the Government have introduced, which was carried out by a partnership project involving the local authority, the police, business and the Safer Luton partnership. Some of the work being done in Luton to prevent youth crime leads me to believe that the measures in part I will be valuable in tackling some of the issues that are not at present being addressed.

I recently had the opportunity to see one of our youth courts in action, dealing with a young local offender. The judge asked the lad, "Have you ever appeared before me

[Ms Margaret Moran]

in court before?" The lad replied, "Dunno. What time do you get up?" That episode summarised the way in which the courts relate to young offenders and confuse both them and many of the other people who participate in the process.

That is why the measures in the Bill that focus on prevention and restorative justice for first-time offenders are so important. The introduction of non-criminal youth offender panels and the involvement of young people in taking responsibility for their actions are both radical and vital if we are to have a significant effect in reducing new crime.

Our experience in Luton leads me to believe that it is crucial that the measures work seamlessly with those in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. So far, five parenting orders have been issued in Luton. Those have been linked to provision for parenting classes, for which the Home Office has provided start-up grants. In addition, we now have bail support workers and development workers for youngsters who might otherwise have been remanded in custody.

A great deal of work is being done to prevent young offenders from reoffending, but the missing link, as my constituents, especially those in Caddington and Stopsley would say, is a means of tackling first-time offenders without requiring them to go through the courts system, which has the potential to turn them into young criminals. There is evidence that that has happened in the past. Part I will provide that element.

When my hon. Friend the Minister considers the implementation of the Bill, I hope that he will recognise the impact of the new duties, especially in administrative and management functions, on youth offending teams. We must ensure that the provisions already in place work seamlessly and recognise the extra work that the Bill will make for youth offending teams.

It is to the great credit of the Government that they are introducing the measures in part II to protect vulnerable and intimidated witnesses, as recommended in "Speaking up for Justice". It is nothing short of a tragedy that some of the recommendations in the Piggott report in 1989 and the Utting report in 1997—which addressed the need to ensure greater safeguards for the most vulnerable members of our community in the face of a complex legal system—were not enacted by the previous Government. This Government are to be commended for moving swiftly to implement our manifesto commitment to ensure that greater protection is given at trial to victims of rape and serious sexual offences and to ensure that those who have been subject to intimidation, including witnesses, are protected by the legal system.

In the past, the system for trying rape cases has failed victims, predominantly women, because access to justice has been denied to them by the enormous legal and psychological obstacles that exist. The current practice, which allows extensive cross-examination of women by the alleged rapist, is nothing short of cruel and degrading. Rape, violence and sexual abuse against women and children must be seen as different from other forms of crime and the law should recognise that. Such abuses are usually about power relationships. Sadly, but not unexpectedly, the legal system reinforces that power imbalance in that women are subjected to what has been described as a second violation in court at the hands of their alleged attacker or even at the hands of those who are part of the legal system. Therefore, it is crucial that the Bill offers protection to women and children in those circumstances.

In rape cases, women feel guilty and insecure. As other hon. Members have vividly described, a woman in those circumstances has had her whole essence violated. She must be sure that the law will protect her and prevent intimidation, but that is not the current experience of women. An audit carried out a few years ago in Luton by the Safer Luton partnership found that there was widespread under-reporting of rape and sexual abuse cases. The Luton and district rape crisis centre, which is one of the oldest in the country, told me that, in the year to March 1998, it had 307 calls from victims of rape or attempted rape. Some 128, 47 of whom were men, of those were seen and counselled. Of those 128, only 21 incidents were reported to the police. That is a tragically low reporting level and it means that women are not confident that the system will bring to justice the perpetrator of their rape and assault.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Lady's comments have some force and I would not wish to pretend otherwise. However, has she considered that the process of going to the police station, being taken into the rape suite and undergoing a forensic examination, is inherently distressing and that, as much as the prospect of attending a criminal trial, weighs with prospective complainant?

Ms Moran: I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman. That is why we need to ensure that there is greater training for the police and members of the legal system to ensure that women who undergo undoubtedly the most traumatic experience of their lives have proper support.

However, it is obvious from women who have been counselled by the Luton and district rape crisis centre that they are prevented from seeking justice by the experience that they will have to face in court. That crisis centre feels obliged to tell women fully and frankly what they will experience so as to ensure that they do not embark on a judicial process that will cause further damage to that which is already unutterably devastating for women. That is a second terrible process. Women are rightly advised that they might face a further interrogation which will bring back all the memories and recent hurt of the incident, and that prospect prevents women from having recourse to the judicial system. That is why the Bill is so important.

The fact that a woman's previous sexual history is explored and that she is interrogated on that means that justice may be denied to her from the outset. Women will have a variety of reasons for not reporting or proceeding with a case, but the current legal system is a major influence on women's decision to proceed or not.

Of those women who report rape, fewer then one in 10 see their attacker convicted. In Luton last year, 31 reported rape and attempted rape cases were dealt with by the police, of which only nine were detected.

There is clearly a problem of lack of training in the legal system. There is a long wait between the incident and the court case and women feel that they have insufficient support during the process, particularly

insufficient information, especially when the Crown Prosecution Service is involved. That means that women's confidence in the system is undermined. That needs to be addressed every bit as much as the legal issues that we are debating today.

The Luton and district rape crisis centre told me that it can be extremely damaging, personally and psychologically, for a woman to be interrogated in court. It cited one case where the fact that a woman had gone for counselling between the incident and the hearing was used against her in court to imply that she had been tutored to lie about that incident.

In such circumstances, it is no wonder that 41 per cent. of women interviewed by Victim Support in 1996 said that they felt that they were on trial rather than the defendant, and that many felt re-victimised by the court process.

On average, cross-examination in a rape case is twice as long as in other trials, and, despite the fact that judges have a discretion to disallow evidence of sexual history, it is still used in 75 per cent. of rape trials. That is why we cannot simply rely on the good will and best view of the judge. Women in such circumstances need legal protection.

Luton's Victim Support told me of one case where a 20-year-old woman endured an abnormally long and, in its view, unreasonable cross-examination at Luton Crown court. Despite the fact that she was a virgin, her sexual history was widely discussed. As a result, she had a nervous breakdown during the trial and the jury returned a hung verdict. Because of her experience of the dreadful interrogation she would not allow the case to go to re-trial, so it was lost. The final indignity was that, as a result, her criminal injury claim had to be cut by 50 per cent. In such cases the credibility of the criminal justice system is undermined and rapists walk free, perhaps to rape again.

Will the measures in part II prevent such injustices? The answer is broadly, yes. I welcome them, but I agree with some of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have said that, in some respects, the Bill does not seem to offer sufficient protection even when a balance is struck between the rights of the defendant and of the accuser in the legal process. The most important issue concerns the matter of previous sexual history. If no is to mean no, a woman's previous sexual history must not be used as evidence of her consent in any circumstances. As a lay person, I feel that those provisions seem to offer too many loopholes to the court to allow such evidence.

In particular, clause 40(3)(b)(ii), which was introduced in the other place, seems to fall into the trap of implying that evidence of a strikingly similar behaviour could be admissible at the court's discretion. There could be grave dangers in undermining the excellent intent of the Bill by that clause. It is regrettable that the provisions of the New South Wales legislature, which lists circumstances in which such evidence is admissible, is not considered for inclusion in the Bill. Although I understand the reasons why that may be the case, we could amend the Bill in ways to improve the protection of vulnerable women.

Similarly clause 40(3)(a), which allows in certain circumstances such evidence where the defence argues that the perpetrator had an honest belief in consent, opens up a whole arena which could undermine worthy attempts to protect women. I hope that we shall have some opportunity to strengthen those provisions. I urge the Government to look closely at an amendment to the substantive law on the definition of rape. That is one of the problems that we are encountering here and, although it is outside the scope of this Bill, that review is needed urgently.

In conclusion, I have two questions to ask the Minister on clause 17 and the provision of special measures. As other hon. Members have said so excellently, victims need certainty about this provision of protection. Can the Minister clarify that the courts will be encouraged to provide such protection for women who have suffered from domestic violence? In those circumstances, the need of women for protection from harassment and intimidation is often as great in the court as elsewhere. I hope that he can confirm that the courts will be encouraged to allow that protection for women in those circumstances.

My second question relates to child abuse. I agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes) about the inadequacy of legislation to protect children from sexual abuse. Can the Minister clarify whether the provisions in the Bill will assist in the prosecution of greater numbers of offenders, particularly where the children are aged five or under? Recently I was appalled and angry when I dealt with a constituency case in which the family and a child of five have been traumatised by the process of giving evidence to the police and dealing with the Crown Prosecution Service, only to be doubly traumatised by being told that, because the child is five and is unable to give proper evidence in court, the case will not proceed. That not only leaves the child feeling that it has been found guilty of lying, and traumatises the family, but potentially allows child abusers repeatedly to abuse children aged five and under without proper redress.

I understand from the mother that the child protection service in our area has advised her that fewer than 10 per cent. of cases involving children aged five or under are successfully brought to court, and that fewer such cases are successfully prosecuted. It cannot be right that protection of the most vulnerable in our society—those who have most difficulty in articulating their problems and who need our protection most—is denied. I hope that the Minister will confirm that, under the Bill, the Government will do their utmost to ensure that, in so far as possible, such a situation is never allowed to happen again.

I commend the Bill. It is important; it introduces radical measures to prevent youth crime and redresses some long-standing injustices concerning vulnerable and intimidated witnesses. I hope that we have the opportunity to improve and refine those measures further, and so ensure that we afford the most vulnerable the greatest possible protection.

5.41 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): We should examine the Bill in the light of Labour's election promises, especially those on women, with which I appreciate several hon. Members have dealt in detail. In the run-up to the election, the Labour party made a great deal of its promises to women to improve their position when they are brought to court in sexual offence cases.

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

At the Labour party's October conference, the Home Secretary said:

"All too often, the prospect of intrusive and unnecessary cross-examination in court is too much for many women."

I hope that, in Committee, that will cause him to pay particular attention to clauses 40 and 41, which leave very large loopholes through which protection can be abused. Clever defence lawyers will find many ways around the legislation, allowing continued humiliation and discrediting of victims of sexual crimes. If the Government fail to tighten up the Bill in that respect, they will have failed to honour the promises that they made in the run-up to the election.

I am also concerned about the report of the statement by the Labour party's women's unit, which is headed by Baroness Jay, and to which the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) referred. It implies that a woman's behaviour during sexual activity should be used as a means of undermining her case that she did not give her consent. Whether she screams and kicks in her normal sexual activity is deemed in the report to be a possible relevant cause of a man declaring that he honestly believed that she was consenting. I raised in an intervention the point that one can interpret that the other way around: if a woman remains passive during an attack in order to protect herself, she could equally be accused of giving consent.

In many countries, consideration of a woman's sexual history in such cases—and of a man's in cases of gay rape—is banned. I raised the matter with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), and he rightly put me in my place by stating that I was referring to matters relating to defendants, not witnesses. I am sure that it does not need to be said, after everything that has been said in the House today, that the woman who is the victim, or the plaintiff, or as my right hon. and learned Friend referred to her, the witness, is often treated almost as if she was the defendant, such is the venom of the cross-examination that she has to undergo.

Although I understand that lawyers like to see things in a clear, objective, cut-and-dried fashion, a large element of humanity must be considered in the conduct of proceedings in our courts. There must be a limitation on the prurience that such cases attract. The Government's report "Speaking up for Justice" said that judges allowed up to 75 per cent. of defence applications to cross-question the victim on her sexual history in ways that seemed

"to go far beyond that demanded in the interests of relevance and . . . fairness to the defendant."

That is the same as saying that the victim, witness or plaintiff—I prefer to use that word because it is slightly less emotive—is treated unfairly. She is the complainant, but she is treated as if she was the defendant. The courts and the legal profession have to take that into account.

We still live in a country in which the long history of the treatment of woman lingers on. A woman's freedom to engage in sexual activity is always considered to be more limited than that of a men. That hangover is the reason why women's sexual history becomes such a potent part of rape trials. The same applies to some extent in cases of child abuse. The prurient element is often very detrimental to the victim.

I am sure that there are people here today who are barristers—not least my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham—who could explain why sexual abuse cannot be considered as grievous bodily harm. To do so would remove a great deal of the emotive aspect. A woman who is raped is physically and, if you like, mentally abused, but she is being abused. If we leave the sexual element out, we might consider such cases in a more objective way. The same applies to what is normally called domestic violence, which is simply grievous bodily harm. However, because it is domestic, there is always a suggestion that the woman somehow connived at the treatment that she received. I go back to the point that that is a big flaw in the remarks attributed to the Labour party's women's unit. I urge the women on the Government Benches to take that up. I believe that they should correct the attitude that is inherent in those remarks. I believe that it is inherent generally in the way in which we consider such matters.

The courts have an unhappy history of treatment of women in rape cases. As we have already said, many women do not go to court because they know how women are treated in such cases. A great deal of that stems from a widespread hangover of sexist attitudes in our society. It is good to remember that women were considered almost as chattels until recent times. They had almost no rights in marriage and certainly no property rights. Sexist attitudes still prevail.

If hon. Members think that it is just me saying that, I urge any of them who have five minutes to spare to take a look at the book by Jill Seward, the victim in the Ealing vicarage rape case. Three males were involved, two of whom abused her in what even the judge referred to as a foul and disgusting way. They were given five-year sentences. A little bit was added on because they were there to commit a burglary. Nevertheless, one of those men was out after three years and the other served less than his five-year sentence. That is not uncommon. Many soft sentences are handed down by geriatric judges in our courts, often in cases that involve women and their sexual lives. Our courts are besmirched as a result of that and they need to do something about it. The Bill must deal with sentencing and the length of sentences.

After the vicarage rape case, Lord Lane, who was then the Lord Chief Justice, said that the sentences had been too lenient. That is not surprising, because the third man in that case, who did not take part in the rapes, but was involved only in the burglary, got 14 years. That contrast shows that the courts make dreadful mistakes, however learned the individuals who serve the courts may be and despite their elevation to the status of judges. Those mistakes are an abuse of the people who appear before the courts.

We listen to such learned gentlemen who usually occupy the Front Benches of this Chamber when it comes to legal matters; they are usually appointed Home Secretary or shadow Home Secretary. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) is an honourable exception.

Mr. Hogg: Or the shadow Home Secretary—what about my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler)?

Mrs. Gorman: There are exceptions. However, the point is that such learned gentlemen do not always get it right; they lecture us in this place and sometimes attempt to intimidate us.

I should like the Bill to deal with the power of sentencing. I am not a lawyer, but I understand that it is possible for the Director of Public Prosecutions to lay down consistent penal policy and sentencing that would be reflected in courts throughout the country. Judges would have strong guidelines on the policy in such cases.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I want to make one small point before the hon. Lady goes completely off track and reduces the good points that she made earlier. The Director of Public Prosecutions has no power at any time to direct the level of sentencing. That is for the Lord Chief Justice in the Court of Appeal.

Mrs. Gorman: If I may say so, that is a typical legal intervention and an attempt to humiliate the witness, plaintiff, or victim—as I consider myself to be. *[Interruption.]* I am now informed by the more gentle counsels of my colleagues that I should have been talking about the Court of Appeal.

However, as a lay person, I make the point that sentences are much too varied and, in the majority of rape cases, they are far too lenient. I hope that the Committee will deal with the issue of the sentences that are handed down by the courts.

It is about time that we had more women judges, who could influence the law. That is a tangential point and I realise that it is not specifically covered in the Bill, but as this is a Second Reading debate and I can say what I like, I shall say it again. I believe that that point is reflected in the general attitude to women in our courts. I make no excuses for putting the women's perspective because our courts are far too heavily dominated by men. There are sensitive issues about people's personal behaviour, their right to their personal behaviour and the abuses that they often sustain because they are less informed or less articulate and more easily humiliated. We need the advice of a woman in deciding on the laws of our country as they apply in such cases.

When the Bill reaches Committee, I hope that the Government will reconsider clauses 40 to 42 and address the concerns that have been brought to my attention by a group of more than 200 organisations, headed by Women Against Rape, and including Victim Support and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Those organisations have stated that they feel "let down" by the Bill. I am sure that Ministers feel suitably chastised and humiliated by the fact that all those worthy bodies feel that the Bill is not up to the mark, and that they will take the opportunity in Committee to do something to meet those concerns.

I am sure that the details of those concerns are well known to the Government, and I do not wish to detain the House any longer than is necessary, but I feel strongly that both the public's attitude to rape cases and victimisation of plaintiffs by the courts themselves are issues that should concern the law and be reflected in the Bill.

5.56 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I declare an interest as a recorder of the Crown court, a lawyer and one who has, for some years, sat as an acting metropolitan stipendiary magistrate. I suppose that that makes me a geriatric judge—

Mr. Boateng: Not geriatric.

Mr. Malins: That is kind of the Minister. Nevertheless, I feel that I should apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) for being a geriatric judge.

Over the years, I have had to sentence many young people and contend with many vulnerable witnesses, so I recognise that issues raised in the Bill are extremely important and I am happy to give the Bill a broad welcome. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and the hon. Members for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and for Basildon (Angela Smith) said that the vast majority of young people in this country behave impeccably, have nothing to do with the criminal courts and contribute greatly to our society. They were absolutely right to say so, but I believe that they would agree that young people today are growing up in a dangerous and difficult world—one more dangerous and difficult than it was, say, 30 years ago.

In today's world, young people are exposed, often too young, to aspects of life that would be better met when they are older. Influenced by an often malevolent and irresponsible media, they witness more family break-ups than ever before. They see fragmentation of community and family life—how many youngsters today live within a few yards of their grandparents? Housing conditions in our inner cities are often grim, and the prospects of obtaining or retaining a job are less sure than they were previously. Drugs—the greatest evil facing our criminal justice system—are commonplace.

That is why it is so important to prevent a child from embarking on a criminal career. A good home and family, a good education, the prospect of a job, plenty of sport at school, discipline, pride, self-esteem and, perhaps most important, literacy are all factors that can help youngsters to stay away from crime. The other side of the coin is the youngster who regularly appears before me in court. The odds are that he comes from a broken home, and, as happens so often, he has no parents in court to support him—a situation referred to by the hon. Member for Basildon. He is illiterate, he has no pride and no job and he has probably dabbled in drugs. At school, this typical young man truanted regularly. The prospects for him are bleak.

Anything that the House can do, not only to prevent offending in the first place, but to prevent re-offending by young people, must be done. Therefore, the Opposition approach the Bill in a spirit of co-operation with the Government, because it is important that we work together on those issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale dealt at some length with the important new sentence of referral to a youth offender panel. We believe that is a sensible, forward-looking measure. The terms of the contract under clause 8 are sensible and will impose great obligations on a defendant. However, I must make two points. First,

[Mr. Malins]

I speak as a sentencer when I say that it is surely right that sentencers be given a wide discretion as to the circumstances in which that sentence is used.

It is quite wrong in principle to remove the court's discretion and impose the sentence of referral to a youth offender panel whenever there is a guilty plea by a first offender who is not to be given a custodial sentence or discharged absolutely. My hon. Friends the Members for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) made the same point. By the time they come to sentencing, lay magistrates, stipendiaries and judges have all the facts of the case before them. They have a feel for the case and for the defendant and his or her circumstances. It is almost inevitable that they will have ordered a pre-sentence report to assist them in forming a view about the sentence. As they know so much, they should surely be the ones to decide whether it is appropriate to implement this sentence in any one case rather than having Parliament apply a straitjacket to the courts. As I said earlier, that would be quite wrong.

Sentencers who may have decided to fine or conditionally discharge a young person who appeared before them will know that, if they do anything other than absolutely discharge or give a custodial sentence, they will have to pass the child to a panel. In those circumstances, they might be tempted to hand down what they believe to be the wrong sentence and opt for an absolute discharge—even though they wanted to do something else.

Secondly—and most important—the sentence must have teeth if it is to work. A problem associated with community sentences, such as community service, is that, if the defendant fails to co-operate and breaches the order, the court's powers are very limited when the defendant returns to court. Very little happens in practice. The court has been powerless to deal with a defendant who has breached a community service order—the Home Affairs Committee has said something about that problem—and has been able only to impose a fine or to order the order to continue.

What sanctions should be imposed if a young person fails utterly to co-operate with the youth offender panel? The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) mentioned that point in passing. He was clearly a social worker and, judging from his speech, knows a great deal about this topic. Hon. Members appreciated hearing his views. When a referral is made and the youth offender panel is organised, what will happen if the defendant says that he will not co-operate and turns his back on the whole idea? Under the Bill, it appears that he will simply be referred back to the court and sentenced in another way.

Despite the Home Secretary's remarks at the beginning of his speech, that sentence will almost certainly not include custody, as the youngster will have been referred to the panel in the first place only because a custodial sentence was considered inappropriate. By all means, let us give the young offender guidance and help. However, he should know that a failure to co-operate and play his part to the full will have severe consequences. In short, I believe that the breach of an order should mean an immediate return to court and an inevitable custodial sentence.

Mr. Bermingham: I declare an interest in the debate. I have 30 years' experience in the courts, and I witnessed the shift from the 1960s towards custodial-based sentencing in the 1970s. There was then a brief respite under the Baker reforms—as I call them—when we moved away from custody and the community penalties. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that a child who may have problems beyond his control—perhaps parental, family or even medical problems—should receive a custodial sentence when he breaches an order that may have been imposed without full knowledge of his circumstances? If so, we are moving back to the bad practice of considering custody first and everything else second.

Mr. Malins: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's distinguished career in the law and accept that he makes a serious point. However, I am saying that, when a court makes an order, be it a community service or a referral order, there must be a sanction against the person who, in effect, breaches that order wilfully. He should know that custody will result from breaching the order. By all means give a chance or give help, but there must be teeth. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that argument. We need to drive home to youngsters the difference between right and wrong. I hope that, in Committee, the Bill will be amended to give the courts the strongest powers on any breach.

We must be careful that our youth justice system does not become too bureaucratic, too cumbersome and too expensive, thereby involving a disproportionate number of people. I think it was the hon. Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) who expressed some concern about the extra work load involved not only in the implementation of this Bill but in the implementations of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. It is well known that the volume of paperwork, including various reports, that shuffles round the youth court is far too much. The Crime and Disorder Act imposed a vast array of duties and thereby expenses on local authorities, the police and the probation service. Those bodies are already starved of funds. What implications does the Minister think that the Bill will have for those services? Will he talk about the Bill's financial and manpower implications? The matter was referred to by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre when he talked about resources.

The second part of the Bill introduces a number of special measures to help witnesses in criminal proceedings. We are talking of witnesses who may find the process difficult, who may be overawed, or who may be reluctant, perhaps because of fear. A number of hon. Members have spoken about these measures with feeling. The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes), who served with some distinction on the Select Committee on Home Affairs, had something to say about young witnesses. We valued her contribution. The hon. Member for Luton, South also feels strongly about witness protection measures.

Some of the measures—for example, the use of screens to shield the witness from the accused, evidence by live video link and the removal of wigs by judges—are already widely used in our courts, and to pretty good effect. Their extension is to be given a cautious welcome. I say "cautious" because a balance needs to be struck between competing rights. Yes, the witness has rights and should, as far as possible, be protected. Equally, the accused—let it never be forgotten that he is innocent until proved guilty—has rights, and so do the public. Was it my right

hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) who said that the most important person in a court case of a criminal nature is the defendant?

For those reasons, I think that we should approach with some care the issue of special measures to help witnesses in criminal proceedings. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), who has a long and distinguished career as a solicitor dealing with criminal work, had something to say about the important issue of the rights of the various parties in a court case. The proposed measures need carefully to be examined in Committee.

I shall refer briefly to clause 27 and the video-recording of cross-examination. I feel that we are stepping into dangerous territory. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham had something to say about the issue of cross-examination. There is no doubt that cross-examination is worth while only if it takes place live, with the counsel who conducts it being aware of what has happened in the case up to that moment. Cross-examination by video before the case started would not be a helpful development, as my right hon. and learned Friend argued. Let us consider those measures carefully in Committee, and let us hope that any extension of measures will be used sparingly by the courts when they come into force.

Again, we need to examine cost and practicalities. How many youth and Crown courts does the Minister plan to equip with screens and video links? How long will the process take? What is the expected cost of those measures? Will extra money be provided, or will it have to be found within existing budgets?

One of the most important clauses in the Bill is clause 33, which provides that defendants charged with rape or other sexual offences who choose to conduct their own defence may not cross-examine the alleged victim of the offence. Several hon. Members commented on that, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay.

In general terms, the clause has our support, but the Minister should take on board the fact that concerns have been expressed not only in another place but by senior members of the legal profession. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham and the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy—perhaps I should apologise to the House for quoting three lawyers—expressed concern about clause 33 and succeeding clauses in terms of the rights of the defendant.

Some have argued that the provisions of clause 33 and subsequent clauses are contrary to human rights legislation. Is the Minister satisfied that there is no such conflict? It may be worth introducing an amendment in Committee to the effect that the judge should have power in an exceptional case to grant leave to the unrepresented defendant to put his own questions. I urge the Minister to consider that with the greatest care. I recognise that, in the cases under discussion, the court will appoint a barrister to act for the defendant, but difficulties could arise if the defendant fails to co-operate with a barrister instructed on his behalf.

Clause 37 illustrates the position and reminds us that where, under clauses 33 to 35, the defendant is prevented from cross-examining, the court will appoint a barrister to act for him if he wants one. What happens if he does not want one? The court will appoint a barrister itself. However, once appointed, that barrister has no duty of care towards the defendant and is not responsible to him. One fears the prospect, albeit remote, of miscarriages of justice. Who knows what effect such a saga in court might have on a jury, who might take a view about what is going on and bring in a guilty verdict—

Mr. Hogg: To develop the point a little, does my hon. Friend agree that a line of cross-examination might be pursued by the barrister retained by the court for the benefit of the defendant that was inconsistent with the defendant's line when he went into the witness box? That would be extremely prejudicial to the defence.

Mr. Malins: My right hon. and learned Friend is right. There is no guarantee that the barrister who is instructed by the court to look after the defendant's interest will do so, try hard though he or she might. I know that the Minister recognises that those are serious matters. I appreciate that they might arise only in a very rare case, but they will need to be examined in Committee.

Clause 40, which deals with sexual offences, restricts the ability to introduce, or to ask questions about, any sexual behaviour of the complainant. Will the Minister perhaps comment a little more on clause 40(3)(b), which tells us that questions can be asked about the sexual behaviour of the complainant if the so-called parallel behaviour took place

"at or about the same time"

as the event in question, and if the similarity between those two sets of behaviour cannot be reasonably explained as a coincidence? What does

"at or about the same time"

mean? Does it mean 24 hours? Would it not be wiser and more sensible to have a much wider time frame? Again, the imposition of such a time frame on the court is over-restrictive and will have to be examined again in Committee.

By imposing restrictions on reporting alleged offences involving persons under 18, clause 43 gives much-needed protection, and we welcome it. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said something about the issue. As always on these matters, he spoke with sense, experience and force. I am glad to see the inclusion of the public interest defence and the factors that contribute to that defence, which strike an appropriate balance, but, again, those matters will have to be examined carefully in Committee.

I began by saying that many youngsters grow up in a difficult world. The fact that a committed number of us are in the House establishes that, across the parties, there are hon. Members who have a passionate interest in our criminal justice system. We all believe that preventing a child from embarking on a criminal career by diverting him from crime and by grasping the problem early is important.

Does the House feel that not just the Home Office but every Department of State has a job to do in relation to young offenders? Those in government and local authorities who have anything to do with housing, education or health can, and must, play some part.

Diversion is important. First-time offenders need to be confronted with the reality of what they have done. I was a member of the Home Affairs Committee when it spent

[Mr. Malins]

a day with Thames Valley police to learn more about restorative justice. The Home Secretary referred in positive terms to that police force's work. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole referred to the important issue of victims in our criminal justice system, as did the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

As we learned during the visit to Thames Valley police, restorative justice is all about the conferences' involving young criminals, their victims and their families. My hon. Friend the Member for Poole was right to say, or imply, that making youngsters have contact with the victim—if the victim wants it—does not just help the youngster but helps the victim to overcome the fear that he or she has felt.

I learned about the importance of making a young person realise what pain and suffering a crime can cause. All hon. Members should be impressed by the work of Thames Valley police and hope that it is extended throughout the country, because benefits will undoubtedly result.

I may have doubts about certain parts of the Bill. I wonder whether the costs and sheer bureaucracy of it may be too much. I may be concerned that some parts of the Bill appear to take away powers from the courts and to limit their discretion too much, but none of those concerns is enough to stop me from giving the Bill a broad welcome. It was correct to say, in a spirit of cross-party co-operation, that the Bill may need looking at. I appreciate what the Home Secretary said in that respect. Like us, the Home Secretary and the Minister acknowledge that youth crime must be dealt with by us all in a non-party political way. We can be sensitive and constructive, but I conclude by reminding the House that, above all, youngsters need discipline and strong ethical guidance, as well as the knowledge that, although the law may be there to help, as it should be, it is also there to punish—and to punish harshly when appropriate. We have a big task ahead and I look forward to playing a very small part in it.

6.20 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): I welcome the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) to the Front Bench. He has made an important debut in an important debate and he will bring a welcome fund of wisdom and experience, both professional and judicial, to our deliberations here and in Committee. Where possible, we must build on the consensus in the House and in the country about the need to focus on youth crime.

The Bill is about balance. We must restore the balance that has been lost over the years between the defendant and the victim in court. Having listened to the Conservative contributions, particularly that from the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), I believe that, to a certain extent, they have got the balance wrong over the years. In government, the Conservatives did not give the attention that we are determined to give to the victims of crime. One aim of the Bill is to rectify that imbalance. Some Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), believe that the time has come to give the victim a better deal in our courts. We are determined that that will happen.

The Bill is ambitious and radical. It is ambitious in its aim of a fundamental change in the way in which we deal with first-time young offenders and witnesses. The underlying philosophy of the Bill is the radical belief that the victims and witnesses of criminal offences are key participants in the criminal justice system. Victims, witnesses and defendants must be at the heart of the criminal justice process. If justice does not serve witnesses and victims as well as it serves defendants, it fails. We are determined not to allow that.

Such a radical change means achieving a proper balance between the rights of defendants and the interests of the rest of society in ensuring that crime is reported, prosecuted and punished. Victims of crime, particularly rape victims, are deterred from complaining by the thought of the cross-examination that they will be subject to if they do so. That leads to an unacceptable rate of attrition in the criminal justice system in relation to the offence of rape.

Part I focuses on dealing effectively with young offenders, using the principles of restorative justice to get to the root of their offending behaviour when appropriate, and intervening early. It is important that we get it right. Our considerations in Committee will be vital to our success, as will proper reflection on the piloting that has characterised our approach to many of our proposals.

The Government have taken swift and effective action against youth offenders. Piloting of the main youth justice reforms has been under way in 10 areas since September 1998, and the figures for the period up to 31 January 1999 show that the pilots have started well. There have been 1,435 reprimands, 769 final warnings, 200 reparation orders, 102 action plan orders and 12 parenting orders.

Important points have been made—especially by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran), but also by my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon (Angela Smith) and for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), and reiterated by the hon. Members for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for Woking—on the role of parents in addressing issues of youth offending. We shall expect parents to co-operate in operation of the panels. If they fail to turn up and to take their responsibilities seriously, they may be found to be in contempt of court, from which penalties will flow.

Flexibility has also been mentioned in the debate, and rightly so. Equally, however, it should be said that some parents are much more part of the problem than they will ever be part of the solution. Those are the tragic circumstances in which so many young people continue to find themselves. In such circumstances, it would be quite wrong to make it mandatory for the panel to have the parents before it when those matters are being considered.

Therefore, although parents will be required to be present in the majority of cases, there may be some cases, in which children are looked after by the local authority, when, at least initially, it is desirable not to have parents present but away from the proceedings, so that the young person might effectively share the problems that he or she has had to confront growing up.

I must therefore tell my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes)—who brings enormous experience of front-line youth work to our debates, and who, I hope, will be helping us in Committee—that, no, we shall not make parents' attendance mandatory when a child is looked after by the local authority.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House—but particularly the hon. Members for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and for Woking—have asked why we should not retain for magistrates a discretion in referrals to panels. It is important to understand what is so radical about our proposals on youth offender panels, which will offer not simply another sentence but an alternative. The entire purpose of our proposals on first-time offenders who have confronted and owned-up to their guilt is to take them entirely out of the criminal justice system. The important and novel feature of our proposals on youth panels, therefore, is that those young people will be offered a very different opportunity.

My hon. Friends the Members for Don Valley, for Basildon and for Stretford and Urmston made the point that we have to ensure—as we shall—that we get the panels' composition right. We are already doing it. We should recognise the work that is already being done—not least in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South—to ensure that the experience that we are gaining from operation of youth offending teams will assist in ensuring that we get the panels' composition right. We believe that those panels will affect about 13,500 offenders each year, and we see, arising from that, savings of about £4.5 million a year. That will help us to address the points raised by the hon. Member for Woking in terms of meeting the costs of the live-link facilities, the video evidence and prohibiting cross-examination in person.

We will need to return in detail to the matter in Committee. First, our proposal is the most effective way of ensuring that the abuse of the process that has occurred—albeit on a limited number of occasions—never occurs again. We are still living with its legacy; when the woman is obliged to confront the very person who has submitted her to the horror and humiliation of rape, so aptly and appropriately described by the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale). That must not happen, and I can assure the House that we are satisfied with the proposal. I do not believe that the Lord Chief Justice demurs, and it is certainly the view of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary that the measure is fully compliant with our obligations under the European convention on human rights.

The provision will enable the lawyer appointed by the court to test the evidence; no more. It is not a substitute for proper instructions from a defendant, and we do not pretend that it is. The defendant has made a choice, and has wilfully turned his back on the opportunity to be represented. In those circumstances, our convention obligation, and our obligation to fair process, is to make available to the lawyer all that can possibly be made available to enable the lawyer to test the evidence. That will enable our treaty obligations to be met and our commitment to the fairness of the proceedings to be fulfilled.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Boateng: No, I do not have time to give way. The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity—hopefully in Committee but, if not, on Report—to make his points.

We believe that our proposals are in the interests of justice, and we believe that the balance is right. That is why we will be seeking to proceed, and why we will seek in Committee to reverse the defeat on mandatory referrals in another place. That is not an attack on judicial discretion, but a way of taking forward our radical and appropriate proposals.

The measures to protect witnesses are again about getting the best evidence. There is flexibility in the measures, and that is why it will not be mandatory for the courts to make any particular safeguard available to a witness. Having seen and heard the witness and assessed his degree of vulnerability, and being aware of the evidence that it will be required to handle and the nature of the charges, it will be for the court to determine what measures should be put in place.

Those measures will be about protecting the vulnerable, including the very young. We take the point about concerns in relation to young witnesses of, say, five years old, not being able to give their evidence. The court will have discretion to admit such evidence where it is satisfied that the evidence is of value and will serve the interests of justice.

On cross-examination of previous sexual behaviour, there is a need for balance. We believe that we have got the balance right, and there will be an opportunity to test that in Committee.

Some of the judicial attitudes that have been exhibited in relation to promiscuity, for instance, are simply not acceptable. That is why the Bill does, indeed, to some extent fetter and limit the discretion of the Bench. In the past, that discretion has been exercised in a way that has not been compatible with the public interest.

The measures in the Bill will have a real impact on the way in which the criminal justice system serves society. If we can prevent young offenders from becoming tomorrow's career criminals, we will have done society a real service. If we treat witnesses better and improve the quality of evidence that they can bring to trial, we will improve confidence in the criminal justice system. Building that confidence and creating a climate in which people can support the criminal justice system is central to preventing and reducing crime. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

YOUTH JUSTICE AND CRIMINAL EVIDENCE BILL [*LORDS*] [MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown under the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 24th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Bermingham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has come to my notice over the past few weeks that, when there are curtailed speeches—that is, a limit of 10 or 15 minutes—and when Front Benchers are replying to debates, there has grown up a practice of refusal to accept interventions. I have not suffered from it personally but I have sat in my corner and watched it on many occasions. Perhaps you could discuss with Madam Speaker the fact that that practice destroys debate and detracts from the value of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Today's debate was not time-limited. Interventions are accepted at the discretion of the hon. Member speaking. On time-limited speeches, although it may not be popularly known, interventions can be taken and injury time can be given to the hon. Member concerned.

Mr. Bermingham: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I heard that yesterday for the first time. Perhaps it could be made more widely known throughout the House, because many hon. Members are unaware of it, and that has restricted their ability to give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The ignorance of some hon. Members is absolutely nothing to do with the Chair.

Mrs. Gorman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not the case that the Chair, quite rightly, gives preference to hon. Members who have attended the whole of the debate, so that they can get in their 10-pennyworth, so those who would like to contribute would be well advised to come and sit through the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Patience is always a virtue in the House, as the hon. Lady well knows.

Mortgage Brokers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

6.39 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): The request for this debate originated in the findings of a mystery shopping exercise carried out by Suffolk county council trading standards officers, published at the beginning of this year. But this is not only a Suffolk issue; it is of widespread interest and national importance and concerns millions of people.

A mortgage is the biggest single financial commitment in most people's lives. For most of the British people, more of their money is wrapped up in mortgages than in anything else. Ours is a country with a high percentage of home ownership. It is essential to have a system that is fair to consumers, providing them with good value for money and protecting them from being misadvised or exploited in any way.

A mortgage today is a complex product that comes in a bewildering range of varieties. As the National Consumer Council says:

"Our research shows that the whole business of getting a mortgage is an absolute minefield for consumers".

After the scandal of the mis-selling of financial products under the previous Government—in conditions largely generated by them—people are now delighted and relieved that the new Government's manifesto commitment to clean up the mess and provide protection is being implemented.

The establishment of the Financial Services Authority, the regulation of the sale of investments, and the work done so far on recovery in pensions mis-selling cases, have all been heartening for our people. Yet the question of extending that regulation to mortgages, mortgage lenders and intermediaries, whom I shall call brokers, remains undecided.

In the draft Financial Services and Markets Bill, the Government are taking reserve powers that would enable them to do that, and I welcome that more. However, because the mortgage code was introduced in July 1997, so soon after the Government came to power, it is understandable that they wish to see first whether a voluntary approach can work, so as to avoid the need for legislation and regulation if possible.

However, I find it surprising that mortgages were not automatically included, as many mortgages involve a combination of products, including insurance endowments, personal equity plans and so on—products covered by the FSA—and the broker will be selling such packages.

The key questions are: is the code working, and will it work? The Government will have to decide that later this year. Those who operate the mortgage code register of intermediaries are trying hard. So far, they have registered 20,000 firms and 47,000 brokers, and lenders say that they will not accept business from non-registered brokers.

Copies of the code have been produced, too, with a useful leaflet called "You and your Mortgage", which, by the end of the month, will be given out at the first point of contact. Qualifications have been devised, and many people are registering to take them, but they are not currently mandatory.

An arbitration scheme for handling complaints has also been set up, and compliance monitoring strategy is being developed. Some sanctions will be introduced at the end of the month, including formal warnings, fines and deregistration, plus some naming and shaming. Eight brokers have been deregistered so far.

That is all reasonable and responsible action, but one still has to ask: is it working? Will the code really give the protection that people really need? The only way to find out is to test it, and that is what Suffolk trading standards officers did through their mystery shopping exercise, following an increasing number of complaints.

The county trading standards officers' findings paint a worrying picture. None of the 31 brokers whom they interviewed complied fully with the mortgage code of practice, and more than half of them failed to promote it or even to mention its existence. A similar proportion failed to disclose whether they would receive a fee for arranging the mortgage, and a similar number failed to declare whether they were acting independently or had access to only a restricted number of lenders.

In half the interviews attended, poor-quality information was provided, even including incorrect calculations and questionable assumptions about investment growth for linked endowment policies. Officers found that 12 brokers gave financial advice without first determining the customer's attitude to financial risk. Six advisers made so many misleading statements in favour of endowment mortgages that the officers strongly suspected that the motive for the advice was the commission that the adviser would receive from insurance companies, rather than the best interests of customers.

To be fair, I must tell the House that the officers felt that 58 per cent. of brokers volunteered some good advice in the interviews, but that leaves 42 per cent. who did not. It does not alter the officers' overall findings.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that many of the practices discovered in Suffolk are common throughout the country and reflected in almost every independent examination of the industry? Because endowment mortgages are now discredited, they are disguised as flexible mortgages, and many so-called independent brokers are anything but independent. The situation that my hon. Friend describes is a scandal in the making that could be of epic proportions and equivalent to the pension scandals of the 1980s.

Mr. Blizzard: My hon. Friend is right. That scandal in the making has been in evidence for some time and is not confined to Suffolk. Indeed, Suffolk is a relatively law-abiding county with some of the lowest crime rates in the country. Sharp practice and failure to observe the code is certainly not confined to Suffolk. The picture revealed by the mystery shopping exercise is replicated around the country.

The Consumers Association has also carried out a mystery shopping exercise and reported it in *Which?* in October. It, too, found evidence of widespread endowment mis-selling and non-compliance with the code. I have also come across another report from Market Audit Research, published last month. That contains the results of its mystery shopping exercise for 61 mortgage lenders. I tried to find out from the report which lenders failed to comply with the code, but it was easier to find those who were code compliant—only three, according to that report. For example, 91 per cent. failed to inform the consumer of the service levels offered at the outset. Some 54 per cent. did not include mandatory information when providing quotations or illustrations. Some 60 per cent. did not comply when quoting future repayment amounts at standard variable rates outside the initial, incentivised period. The report concluded that, in certain sections, the code of practice appeared to have been written for the convenience of lenders rather than the assistance and protection of consumers. It did not believe that lenders were complying with the spirit of the code. If a voluntary code is to work, those operating under it must comply with its spirit.

Another practice, called bundling, also causes concern. It is the practice of tying home insurance policies to the mortgage product. Allegations of such practices come from competitors, but I have personal experience of taking out such an insurance policy and then finding that it is more expensive than those available on the open market. Many people walk into the trap. Although the code prohibits it, it is still happening.

A report in *The Sunday Times* on 7 March was headlined:

"Salesmen admit to dirty tricks on endowments".

It said:

"Former staff at several of Britain's leading insurers . . . have revealed how they were trained to 'frighten' clients into buying endowment mortgages with a variety of slick sales tricks.

One of the salesmen . . . said: 'On my first day of training I was told, "If you are not frightening your clients you are not doing your job."'"

Whoever sold the most would win a day at the races or a champagne dinner.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): The selling of endowments is undoubtedly a national scandal with serious implications because home owners rely on a lump sum payment at the end of their mortgage to repay it. If that is not available, home owners could face repossession of their homes. Incentives and fees for brokers have encouraged them, to put it politely, to direct home owners towards a type of mortgage that may be damaging to their future housing prospects and may even lead to homelessness.

Mr. Blizzard: My hon. Friend is right. At one time, many people were sold optimistic endowments with monthly payments that anybody advising them should have realised were never likely to generate the amount required when the debt needed to be repaid.

Out of all the evidence, there emerge two main areas of concern. The first is to do with endowment mis-selling. That is now covered by the Financial Services Authority, but it is still clearly going on. I hope that, when my hon. Friend replies, she will say something about what plans there might be to ensure that the FSA considers compliance there.

There is evidence that the code is not working in practice. It has some weaknesses. First, there is nothing to define the competence of an individual broker. Anyone with a consumer credit licence and £95 can register. There is no entry test or qualification, and there is still no mandatory qualification once someone is registered.

[Mr. Blizzard]

The value of registration of the broker depends upon the lender. Lenders have said that they will deal only with registered brokers, but I think that that is questionable, and so do Suffolk county council's trading standards officers, because they found 10 members who made no checks at all.

Market audit research found that most lenders were not following the code. There is also the question of whether all lenders are, or future lenders will be, members of the Council of Mortgage Lenders. It is more and more likely that foreign banks and lenders, particularly in the European dimension, may be providing the money for mortgages. So there are all kinds of questions there.

There is also the question of compliance and monitoring. I have not been able to find out how many people the Mortgage Code Register of Intermediaries has working on compliance and monitoring. I suspect that it is not many. I am not sure what it can do given its resources based on the registration fees about which I have spoken. In addition, it has no local knowledge. It relies on a centralised service.

There are huge question marks over compliance. In December, the MCRI, in its publication, said:

"All agreed that it would not be economic for MCRI to endeavour to check all of its 19,000"—

now 20,000—

"registered firms every three or four years and accepted that compliance activity should be focused on areas and firms where the potential risk appeared highest."

There was a suggestion that some of the larger firms had compliance methodologies that could be applied—but again, who decides whether those firms are complying? As I have said, many of them do not comply.

It can be argued that these are early days. To be fair to the MCRI, it was a big job to take us out of a completely unregulated situation, and it has made progress. One could argue that, over time, compliance will develop and improve. On the other hand, one could also say that, as time passes, it is equally likely that some brokers will find more and more ways to sidestep the code as they become used to it.

We then come to the question of sanctions. I asked whether the fines under the voluntary code were enforceable. I asked whether the MCRI would expel large firms on which it depends for income, and what would happen to someone who is deregistered. Will they just continue working—often they can—or could they re-register in another capacity?

What is really alarming about the evidence is the scale of non-compliance in terms of the number of firms and individuals involved and the number of points on which each is not complying. It is not surprising that the National Consumer Council recommends that the regulation of the mortgage business come under the FSA.

Furthermore, the Treasury Select Committee, when it reported, also came out in favour of regulation by the FSA. From following the discussions of the joint committee on the Financial Services and Markets Bill, it appears to me that it is heading in that direction.

It is difficult to see why mortgages should be kept separate from other key parts of the home-buying package, such as endowment PEPs—now ISAs, I think—and so on. Why should we think that the voluntary code will work with mortgage selling when it is now widely accepted that such a code could not be trusted to work with the selling of other financial products and services?

It is not just that similar people are involved. I am not suggesting that all mortgage brokers or financial advisers are at fault; my personal experience of them has been good. Rather, it is that a similar process is involved, in which many customers are unclear, unsure and confused about what they are buying and getting. On the other side, we have the broker or adviser who stands to make various gains depending on the customer's choice or the products sold to him. The test for the broker at each stage of the process must be to ask himself or herself, "Am I acting in the best interests of the customer?" We need to have a system that ensures that the answer is always yes. Statutory regulation focuses minds far better than a voluntary code and, moreover, for longer. My concern is that, over time, a voluntary code would relax.

There is also a question about the European dimension. Can a voluntary code operate in isolation from Europe? I do not know, but we must have in place a system that can link in with Europe.

The Suffolk trading standards officers should be congratulated. Their exercise has reverberated around the country. From the evidence that I have seen, it acted as a stimulus to the MCRI, which has come forward with further ideas on compliance and sanctions. I have learned today that the local authority co-ordinating committee of trading standards officers has agreed to carry out 25 mystery shopping exercises later in the year. I hope that they will be conducted in time to inform the Government's review.

I urge my hon. Friend to use the reserve power in the Bill to regulate mortgage brokers and lenders. I agree with the MCRI that the code should be used as a basis for those regulations and that it has carried out some good work. That work needs the force of law. So much is at stake for individuals that we cannot rely on good intentions and keeping our fingers crossed. People need to have confidence in financial services, including mortgage selling. The code is a worthy step forward, but not enough. People would prefer the protection of law.

6.57 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on securing this debate on an extremely important subject. I only regret that there are no Members on the Opposition Benches to debate this issue with us. I thank my hon. Friend for visiting me this afternoon, together with Suffolk county council trading standards officers, to ensure that I have the full picture on the extremely useful survey that they carried out.

As my hon. Friend said, taking out a mortgage and buying a house is one of the biggest financial transactions that most of us ever get involved in. The growing complexity of mortgages means inevitably that there is greater scope for misunderstanding, perhaps for mis-selling and for consumers to get a raw deal. We are determined to ensure that consumers get the protection that they need and deserve in that extraordinarily important financial transaction.

It may help if I summarise the factual position as it stands. There are some 10.5 million mortgages outstanding at the moment. The number of complaints that

are made in relation to mortgages are, I am happy to say, small compared with that figure. In 1995, there were 50,000 complaints—about 0.5 per cent. of the total number of outstanding mortgages. Nor is it true to say as some do—I am glad that my hon. Friend did not fall into this trap—that mortgages are wholly unregulated. First of all, more mortgages were brought within the scope of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 when the upper limit was increased to £25,000. All mortgages are subject to the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1994, irrespective of the amounts involved. The Office of Fair Trading is considering redemption penalties in relation to compliance with those regulations—

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Ms Hewitt: As my hon. Friend said, many of the complaints about mortgages, like many of those which came to light from the Suffolk county council exercise, relate to endowments that are being sold alongside mortgages, which are of course already regulated by the Financial Services Authority. Because that investment business is already regulated, the majority of intermediaries, who are also advising on mortgages and selling mortgage products, must be authorised by the FSA. So, there is already some protection, both from the FSA and in other parts of the law, for consumers who are buying mortgages and products relating to them.

Clearly, such protection is not enough. That is why the Council of Mortgage Lenders decided to introduce its code of practice. As my hon. Friend has acknowledged, we are monitoring extremely closely the performance of that code and looking to the Council of Mortgage Lenders to ensure that the provisions are properly enforced by both lenders and intermediaries. As he also acknowledged, it must be right to give that code a fair trial. It has only been in operation for lenders since July 1997 and for intermediaries since April 1998. However, it is essential that we have good information on whether the code is working before we reach a decision about the draft Financial Services and Markets Bill and the scope of its authority.

I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Suffolk county council trading standards officers on the mystery shopping exercise that they recently conducted. It was an admirable piece of research, and I am extremely grateful to the officers not only for conducting it but for making available to the Council of Mortgage Lenders and, indeed, the Treasury the transcripts of the 31 interviews which were undertaken during it.

My hon. Friend is right to say that that the results of that mystery shopping exercise are disturbing, because they suggest that all the brokers who were visited were, in some respect or another, failing to comply with the provisions of the code. I have no doubt that the Council of Mortgage Lenders and the MCRI will take the findings extremely seriously—we shall certainly do so. Indeed, detailed transcripts of the six cases in which the trading standards officers concluded that there was evidence to suggest that brokers were in danger of mis-selling endowments along with mortgages have already been referred to the FSA. I understand that the FSA is investigating that matter, as, indeed, the MCRI is investigating the general picture that emerged from all 31 brokers who were visited.

There are of course differing views on whether mortgages should be brought fully within the scope of the FSA. I shall monitor extremely closely and carefully the operation of the code, as my predecessor undertook to do. I will expect to hear from consumer groups and, as my hon. Friend has said, from other trading standards officers, as well as from the Council of Mortgage Lenders, brokers, intermediaries and lenders themselves. I will also expect the Council of Mortgage Lenders to come forward if it believes that there is evidence that its members and the intermediaries are delivering what the code requires. The onus of proof, in other words, will be on the Council of Mortgage Lenders. It will need to show me what steps it has taken to ensure that the results that were revealed in the exercise, and may have been replicated in others, will not be found in future.

When we were elected, we inherited a thoroughly unsatisfactory system of financial services regulation. There were nine different regulators, with different ombudsmen and complaints and compensation systems to match. It is not surprising that, as we saw with the personal pensions mis-selling scandal, real threats to the interests of consumers had been allowed to arise in the gaps between the different regulators. Therefore, we announced in May 1997 that we would put financial services regulation on a statutory footing and create a single regulator. We have already begun that process through the Bank of England Act 1998, by transferring banking supervision for the Bank of England to the FSA, thus establishing the authority which has, through a variety of contracts and memorandums of understanding, taken over and absorbed the regulatory functions that previously existed in a variety of other places.

We are now moving forward with the draft Financial Services and Markets Bill to put the FSA on to a proper statutory basis and give it the powers to make and enforce the rules that are required in the increasingly complex and fast-changing financial services industry. We are also putting in place processes that will protect natural justice and the rights of those who are authorised to sell products as well as the rights of consumers. I am happy to say that the joint committee that is undertaking pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill is making extremely good progress. We expect it to report on 29 April. Mortgages is one of the issues to which the joint committee has paid attention.

Later this year, I will conclude the review of the code of practice on mortgage lending. I certainly hope to have the fruits of the other mystery shopping exercises that trading standards officers in various other parts of the country plan to undertake. I welcome their interest in the matter and their willingness to put time and resources into giving us evidence about whether consumers are getting the protection that they need and deserve from the code.

I will make a decision later this year about whether the scope of the Bill should include all mortgage selling. The Bill provides for mortgages to be brought within its scope and the scope of the powers of the FSA.

Mr. Flynn: My hon. Friend will appreciate the sense of déjà vu that many of us have. There were no complaints in the late 1980s from those who had been mis-sold personal pensions, but the fact that no complaints were registered did not mean that nothing wrong was going on. Can my hon. Friend give us an undertaking that, when

[Mr. Flynn]

she receives the review of the code, she will publish it so that the rest of us can consider it before she takes a decision on it?

Ms Hewitt: I will certainly publish the evidence upon which I base my decision whether to include mortgages within the scope of the Bill. As I have already said, much of the evidence that will be made available to me in that process of monitoring will in any case be published by those who undertake it. Of course I will happily do as my hon. Friend requests.

It is important that we establish a modern system of financial services regulation and that we balance the costs and benefits of regulation. Obviously, there are costs involved in regulation. Clearly, if we decide to bring mortgages fully within the scope of the draft Financial Services and Markets Bill and the FSA, the additional costs of regulation will fall on intermediaries and on lenders, but, in reality, those costs will ultimately fall on consumers. If we bring mortgages within the scope of the Bill, we shall need to be satisfied that the benefits to consumers outweigh the additional costs that regulation will impose on consumers and providers.

I shall return to that matter—as, I am sure, will my hon. Friends—later this year, when we have a better picture and more evidence as to how the code is working and we know whether we can rely on more effective enforcement of the code or need statutory regulation to deliver the objective that we all share—effective protection of consumers.

Once again, I thank my hon. Friend for his concern and interest in this matter. I thank him for drawing the attention of the House to the extremely important survey undertaken by Suffolk's trading standards officers.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 16 April 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Petition

Hunting

9.33 am

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): The petition was collected by various animal welfare societies in my constituency, including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and is typical of many similar petitions that have been presented to the House over the past year. The petition sums up the opinions—as have been revealed by a survey published this week—of Labour Back Benchers.

The petition reads:

To the House of Commons.

The petition of the residents of the constituency of Hull, North declares that we believe that hunting with dogs is cruel and unnecessary and has no place in a modern Britain.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons calls on the Government to act on the overwhelming mandate it has received from Members of Parliament and the public to end hunting by making a clear commitment by the year 2000 to legislate for its abolition.

And the petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In many ways, I move Second Reading with a heavy heart. It gives me no pleasure to have to say that, for far too long, a small minority of mindless, moronic football hooligans have besmirched the reputation of football in this country and dragged the game into the gutter by their anti-social behaviour. All law-abiding citizens and football fans were appalled and disgusted by the inane and violent behaviour of a small minority of thugs and hooligans during the world cup last summer in France, and by the resulting violence in towns and cities in England—800 miles away—when we were knocked out of the cup. The damage that those idiots do to our international reputation, and the misery that they cause, is unforgivable and needs to be dealt with firmly.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is additional poignancy in that he moves the Second Reading of his Bill today, the day after the 10th anniversary of the tragedy at Heysel?

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend is right. I hope that, as the Bill progresses this morning, right hon. and hon. Members will bear that in mind. We owe it to all decent, law-abiding football fans to get the Bill on to the statute book.

Mr. Fabricant: May I just point out for the record that, in error, I said Heysel? I meant Hillsborough.

Mr. Burns: All too often over the past 30 years, our national game has been ruined and our reputation destroyed by these mindless morons. More worryingly, the game has attracted other forms of criminality, such as counterfeiting and drug-related activities, which have added to the problems. It is only fair to point out that the vast majority of football fans are decent, law-abiding citizens, who simply want to go to a match for a peaceful afternoon or evening of family entertainment and to support their favourite club.

Unfortunately, a small, dedicated minority have been determined for far too long to ruin that by their loutish and illegal behaviour. All too often, football matches both here in the UK and abroad have been ruined by the disgraceful behaviour of a minority at the expense of the majority. Our reputation over the years is totally unenviable and nothing to be proud of.

Legislation introduced by the previous Government in the early 1990s and late 1980s—and, since 1997, by this Government—has greatly reduced football hooliganism inside domestic grounds. I pay tribute to both Governments, and I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) in the Chamber today. I pay tribute to the tremendous work that he did with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and

[Mr. Burns]

Hythe (Mr. Howard) in seeking to enhance and strengthen the law to bring these loutish hooligans to book.

In a bipartisan spirit, I congratulate the Government on embracing the ethos of the policies of my right hon. Friends when they came to power. Clearly, combating the problem of football hooliganism is not a partisan, party political issue, but something that unites the vast majority in this House who seek to tackle it.

I pay tribute to the football clubs themselves, for the way in which they have worked with the police to tackle the overriding problem. In the past six years, arrests inside grounds at league matches have declined by 37 per cent. and arrests outside grounds have fallen by 17 per cent.

Recently, I was fortunate enough to attend the Arsenal-Coventry match at Highbury. I spent the whole day with the police, the National Criminal Intelligence Service and club officials, watching how they monitored a major match. I was deeply impressed by their work, and by the way in which they worked together. It was a smooth, turn-key operation, and the depth of intelligence and the minutiae of detail in the planning were first rate.

I do not want to sound complacent but, ironically, there is something of a problem of success with the current legislation. There remain isolated incidents in domestic football stadiums, but the problem is now by and large focused outside the grounds, often some distance away, as the situation arising from our world cup defeat last year demonstrated. Incidents often happen hours before or after a match and can involve those who do not attend matches, but latch on to the sport like leeches to instigate or commit criminal acts.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): What my hon. Friend says tends to confirm my view, but does he accept that there may be a danger that, in presenting the Bill as a football-related measure, in the context of what he said about problems moving away from football grounds and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The right hon. Gentleman seems to be making a speech. Perhaps he could catch my eye later.

Mr. Burns: I think that I understood the gist of what my right hon. Friend was saying, although he can correct me if I am wrong. There are clearly far too many incidents way beyond the football ground that are football related. I will give one classic example. When England was knocked out of the world cup last summer in France, there was rioting, vandalism and disorder in towns throughout this country as a direct result. Those were clearly football-related offences. That is why it is important to have legislation of this nature, which will enable us to bring such offences within the ambit of the law relating to football.

Worryingly, the police have shown that greatly increased safety at Premiership and league grounds has pushed the problem down the scale to smaller grounds, previously renowned for their friendliness and lack of problems. As an article in *The Times* last February said, on their way to the final of the 1998 FA vase at Wembley, the followers of Tow Law Town, aptly known as the Misfits, left a trail of devastation on the road to Wembley, where they wrecked as many public houses as they could. Last August, 30 followers of Doncaster Rovers in the Vauxhall conference invaded the pitch at Dover, hit the goalkeeper in the face and ran amok at a cricket match.

Wisbech Town has become notorious for racial abuse. For example, there was the obscenity last season of Wisbech Town fans throwing bananas on to the pitch at the black player, Barry Hayles, at a Bristol Rovers FA cup tie. I am sure that all hon. Members will be utterly appalled by such mindless, disgusting behaviour. It should stop.

On the international scene, there are growing problems because the legislation is limited in how it can apply to football hooligans. With the number of matches being played overseas at both club and international level increasing, the problem is becoming ever greater. Sadly, I am convinced that regular and increasing problems overseas involving British football fans will hamper our prospects of hosting international sporting events. That is extremely sad, because we would be proud to host such events and run them well and safely, without the disgraceful behaviour that is now all too often associated with our national game.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): My hon. Friend may be inadvertently giving the House the impression that football hooliganism is on the rise. I have just seen the statistics from the National Criminal Intelligence Service, which show a continuing and substantial drop in football hooliganism over the past five years. I do not want to take any more credit for being responsible for some of the measures, along with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), but the fact that the statistics show a steady drop should be put on the record.

Mr. Burns: I am sorry if I inadvertently gave a false impression. The problem has not gone away. The number of incidents has dropped in recent years by 37 per cent. inside stadiums, but by only 17 per cent. outside stadiums. I do not want to give the impression that the problem is escalating out of control, but it would not be right simply to say that, because the number of arrests is going down, the problem is being eliminated.

The focus of the problem has shifted, as the examples concerning smaller clubs and the world cup show, but we cannot be complacent about what happens inside football stadiums at Premiership and league matches, because there is always the propensity for problems to arise, although improved security and police activities have brought down the number of arrests.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): I am a bit confused about what the hon. Gentleman said about events last summer. He said that events in the world cup in France triggered bad behaviour in England, but do not the police have powers to deal with that?

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Such powers exist under public order legislation, but the Bill is designed to strengthen the powers and the penalties

specifically for football-related offences, which we hope will create a greater incentive for people to think twice before engaging in mindless behaviour.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend intend to balance the measures, and especially the stricter penalties of which he has spoken, with civil liberties considerations? Concerns have been expressed, not least by Liberty.

Mr. Burns: I assure my right hon. Friend that I will address those concerns. Perhaps I can leave him with one bon mot to reflect on until I get to that part of my speech. Civil liberties are clearly important, but let us concentrate just a little more on the civil liberties of the vast majority of decent, law-abiding citizens rather than those of a minority.

I strongly believe that more must be done to block loopholes in the legislation and to strengthen the powers of the police and the courts to deal with offenders. I am proud to promote the Bill, because I believe that the powers that it contains will do a lot to combat and alleviate the on-going problem.

My Bill is another measure in what has become a step-by-step approach by both the previous and the present Government to doing everything possible to minimise the problems of football-related crime that are now all too prevalent in this country.

The Bill is divided into three parts. Clauses 1 to 5 are about international football banning orders. Clauses 6 to 8 are about domestic football banning orders and clauses 9 to 12 deal with indecent or racist chanting, ticket touting, and finally, financial provisions and so on. I shall deal with each section in turn.

The Bill would strengthen and tighten existing powers in legislation already in operation, passed both by the Conservative Government and by the current Administration. Clause 1 deals with international banning orders. It gives the court a duty, where someone has been convicted of a football-related offence, to make an international football banning order if it is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds to believe that that would help to prevent violence or disorder at, or in connection with, a designated overseas match.

Of course, the individual concerned would have the right to appear in court to argue why the court should not do that, and would also have a right of appeal if the court decided to go ahead and impose the order.

Mr. Fabricant: I am glad that a right of appeal is being put in, but my hon. Friend will know as well as I do about the long waiting lists for people who have to go to court, whether for criminal or civil cases. Surely, if a banning order were issued, the football match would have taken place before the appeal was heard.

Mr. Burns: We all share a concern that access to the courts and the way in which the courts deal with people should be speeded up. Successive Governments have sought to do that. However, I do not share my hon. Friend's worry, because orders will be issued only after someone has been convicted, and then they may last for several years. Even if an individual could still travel abroad and one match was missed, the order, once in place, would apply to all other matches.

Equally important is the fact that, if an order is not made, reasons must be given in open court why a banning order is not being issued. That represents an important step forward, as it would enable people to understand why the court had not taken a course of action available to it in law.

Clause 3 gives the courts powers to impose conditions when imposing an international banning order, including the surrender of a passport not more than five days before a designated match, and the duty to report to a named police station. That would tighten the existing regime, under which someone subject to an order can attend a police station of their choice without prior notification to that police station. Those changes make the system more watertight and effective, something that I hope the House will universally welcome.

Mr. Maclean: What advice has my hon. Friend received—independent legal advice or advice from the Home Office lawyers—about whether the proposal for the surrender of passports is consistent with article 12 of the international convention on civil and political rights, and the famous legal case, Luisa and Carbone *v.* Ministero del Tesoro?

Mr. Burns: My right hon. Friend has raised an important issue. I would not want to introduce legislation that did not comply with our commitments on human rights, and I assure my right hon. Friend that that element in the Bill, like all the others, has been checked and I am satisfied that there is no conflict.

Mr. Fabricant: There may or may not be conflict with the International Court of Human Rights, but what about the European Union Council directive 73/1148 and Council directive 64/221? What about our friends in Brussels?

Mr. Burns: I am reassured that even a debate on football hooliganism cannot escape wide intrusion from Europe. I can assure my hon. Friend that, as the Bill was drafted, legal advice was sought to ensure that its provisions would in no way conflict either with human rights or with the European directives to which we have signed up. The Bill is compatible with them all and there is no problem.

The significant change that those two clauses would bring about is that, whereas under the Football Spectators Act 1989, the courts are required

"to be satisfied that issuing an order would help to prevent violence or disorder",

under my Bill they would have to have

"reasonable grounds to believe that making the order would help to prevent violence or disorder".

The designation in the 1989 Act is too high a threshold, tougher than in other parts of the criminal law. It is right to lower the threshold and bring the measure into line with other parts of the criminal law.

Clause 2 would add certain offences, such as ticket touting, to those designated as football related. It would also extend the offences listed in schedule 1 of the Football Spectators Act to cover attempts, conspiracy and incitement to commit such offences. Crucially, clause 2 also adds to the list of football-related crimes certain offences of violence and disorder not committed at a

[Mr. Burns]

football ground or on a journey to a football match, but committed within 24 hours of a designated match and related to it. For example, as I explained earlier, acts of violence or disorder in the United Kingdom following our being knocked out of the world cup last year would be considered football-related crimes.

Clause 4 would amend the 1989 Act and increase the minimum and maximum duration of an international banning order from between six to 10 years for those who have served a custodial sentence, and from three to five years for those convicted of a football-related offence who have not been given a custodial sentence.

Clause 5 enhances the procedures for use when someone is convicted of a football-related offence abroad, by simplifying the processes under which details of convictions for corresponding football-related offences committed outside England and Wales are provided to the British courts.

The second part of the Bill deals with domestic football banning orders. Clauses 6 to 8 would improve and make more effective the banning orders that the courts already have the power to make under the Public Order Act 1986 for all designated matches in England and Wales. Those would apply to people convicted a football-related offence, and could be issued for a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of three years, whereas, under current legislation, the courts issue them for anything from three months upwards, and there is no cap on the time that an order can last.

Clause 7 specifies that offences that can trigger a domestic football banning order are the same as those that apply to an international order. Improvements in the powers dealing with both international and domestic banning orders are badly needed and eminently reasonable.

To put the situation into perspective, I must tell the House that those powers are not used in a draconian way but responsibly, with proper checks and balances within the judicial system. The House may be interested to know that the latest available figures show that there are 113 international banning orders and about 4[illegible] domestic banning orders in place, in the context of a league match attendance in 1997-98 of more than 26 million people.

However, I would be less than candid if I did not tell the House that I would like to amend my Bill in Committee to extend the power of the courts to issue international banning orders to unconvicted football hooligans where the courts are persuaded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that a person travelling abroad is likely to commit acts of violence or disorder.

There are numerous precedents within the law, in certain circumstances, of withdrawing unconvicted individuals' rights to travel abroad. For example, unconvicted individuals who are on bail can, under existing law, have their passports removed. Secondly, in certain child custody cases where nobody has committed an offence, if the courts believe that there are reasonable grounds to think that a parent may seek to take a child beyond the jurisdiction of the British courts, that parent, too, can have his or her passport removed, despite the fact that he or she has committed no offence whatever.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend will appreciate that, although there is not a huge attendance in the Chamber today, his last comment has left the House in stunned silence. Does he accept that there is a huge qualitative difference between the two precedents that he quotes for restricting the rights of people to travel abroad and the circumstances of a person who is not convicted of a crime being prevented from travelling abroad simply because people think that he is a criminal? Surely there must be European Court of Human Rights implications for that move.

Mr. Burns: I fully understand my right hon. Friend's concerns, although it will have come as no great surprise to the Chamber to hear me make those comments because it has been widely publicised over the past few months that I would hope to include that provision in the Bill at some stage. I do not share the full concern of my right hon. Friend because, if this provision were included in the Bill at a later stage—I say "if", because it will be up to hon. Members to decide whether the Bill is amended—the power would not be used willy-nilly on a whim.

Due to the actions of my right hon. Friend and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe, we now have the National Criminal Intelligence Service, a highly sophisticated, effective intelligence-gathering unit, which has done much since its creation to help to combat and overcome problems of football hooliganism. The NCIS knows many individuals who are hard-core organisers or participants in football hooliganism, who have been fortunate not to have been charged or convicted and who carry on their illegal activities. It would be up to the courts to decide whether the individual concerned should have a banning order placed on him, based on evidence, intelligence and the test of reasonableness that is used in other aspects of British law.

If someone were to find himself in that position, he would have the right to appear or to be represented in court to argue that it would be wrong to issue a banning order and, if an order were issued, then to appeal. I am satisfied that there are enough checks and balances in the system for that power not to be abused. Obviously, however, that matter will have to be discussed in Committee and the wishes of the House will have to be taken fully into account before any change is made—if a change is made—in Committee.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border also mentioned human rights. I assure him that that matter will be looked into before any amendments are tabled, because one does not want to seek to amend a good piece of legislation with something that might contravene our wider obligations.

Mr. Forth: I hope that my hon. Friend will read what he has said in *Hansard* and reflect on it. He seems to have said, "Don't worry, there is now a sophisticated intelligence-gathering mechanism within our society, which can make accusations against individuals, who, with no due process of law, can then be subject to this sort of sanction." To my mind, that sounds uncannily akin to the old Soviet Union. It, too, had a sophisticated intelligence-gathering mechanism that could encroach on people's freedoms without the due process of law that we used to think distinguished us from that country.

Mr. Burns: My right hon. Friend uses characteristically colourful language. Let me seek to

reassure him. I am sure that he welcomes the fact that we set up the NCIS in the early 1990s. It has done tremendous work, in the field not only of football-related crime but of drugs, counterfeiting and so on, which is helping to improve the security of the ordinary citizen. Obviously, those who work for the NCIS are extremely experienced and good at knowing who may be involved in illegal activities surrounding football.

My right hon. Friend suggests that there would be no due process of law. There would be, because an order would not simply be issued willy-nilly. Any case would have to go before the courts, where the NCIS would have to prove that there were reasonable grounds to believe that, if a person travelled abroad to a football match, he or she might commit an act of violence and disorder. Given that that individual would be able to appear in court or be represented in court to put the case as to why that should not happen, and have a right of appeal if the court decided that there was sufficient reasonableness to believe that he would commit an act of violence or disorder, there are safeguards.

This proposal is just a suggestion. It would have to be discussed in Committee, and whether it becomes part of the Bill would depend on the wishes of this House.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): My hon. Friend ignores the first rule of holesmanship: when one is in a hole, one stops digging. He raised this matter on the Floor of the House this morning, and is now pleading that it will be all right because it will be discussed in Committee. Is he seriously saying that, if the NCIS has information that leads it to believe that a man is a burglar, although he has no convictions for burglary, and he is going to travel abroad to Spain where he might burgle somebody, his passport should be taken away?

Mr. Burns: No, I am saying that, if the NCIS has evidence that leads it to believe that somebody is likely to commit a football-related offence abroad and incite football-related violence or disorder, the NCIS may have, if the amendment is accepted in Committee, the right to go to court to try to get a banning order.

I have raised the matter this morning because I do not want to be accused of glossing over it, or of misleading the House. I am trying to explain exactly what my Bill does and how I should like to see it amended. Whether it is amended or not is not up to me; it is up to hon. Members. However, I do not want to be accused of bad faith in not spelling out at the start what I should like to see in the Bill so that people can take a global view of this legislation.

As we have just seen from interventions, there are civil liberties concerns. However, it is equally important that innocent football fans also have civil liberties to enjoy football matches peacefully. We should not lose sight of the fact that their civil liberties are constantly infringed by a mindless minority.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will my hon. Friend go a little further and say that the House should also have regard to the civil liberties of the communities who suffer when those who are clearly intent on wanton violence and vandalism, or who are known to the police to be inciting such behaviour, travel abroad and commit such offences? Does he agree that, when the House addresses where the balance should be struck in that regard, we must remember the television pictures that we saw showing what happened to businesses in Marseilles and other communities in the south of France, which brought shame on this country?

Mr. Burns: I wholeheartedly share my hon. Friend's sentiments.

Clause 9 closes a loophole in existing legislation on racist and obscene chanting. At present, it is an offence for two or more people to indulge in that disgraceful and disgusting activity with regard to football. The Bill will extend the powers to individuals.

Clause 10 closes a loophole on ticket touting by extending the law to cover the sale of tickets for designated football matches played overseas. Tickets for overseas matches will be sold legally only by authorised sellers.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Burns: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I should like to progress, as several hon. Members wish to speak.

The Bill will impose an estimated additional cost to the public purse of about £100,000, and additional manpower is estimated at five staff. The Bill would come into force two months after receiving Royal Assent, and would therefore be in place in time for most of the next football season.

I am extremely grateful for the cross-party support that the Bill has attracted. This should not be a partisan, party political matter. We should unite in seeking to combat the horror and misery caused by football hooliganism. The Bill tries to do so by closing loopholes in existing law and giving the authorities and courts greater powers to bring thugs and hooligans to justice.

I am heartened by the support attracted by the Government's consultation and my Bill. Many members of the public have written to me offering support. In addition, the Football Association has said of the consultation document, and, by implication, the Bill:

"Abuses by a small number of hooligans of the civil liberties of the peaceful majority make the other measures justified. They will help preserve the civil liberties of the vast majority of the population."

The NCIS said:

"This set of proposals offers a genuine chance to get to grips with what we perceive to be an increasingly worrying situation . . . in particular, we welcome the recommendations on both restriction and exclusion orders."

The Association of Chief Police Officers said the proposals were

"an important development tackling the problems posed by hooligans at football matches."

Any fresh measures against hooligans must make sure that the freedoms of the vast majority who want to attend and enjoy sporting events in peace are not spoiled by the small number bent on violence and disruption. The Bill would give us power to protect the freedoms of the vast majority from the moronic behaviour of a very small minority. I wholeheartedly commend it to the House.

10.13 am

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on his good luck in introducing the Bill, and I shall comment later on how much good luck he has had.

The Bill is welcome as a further step in the continuing fight against football hooliganism. I join those who have said that, in debating a football-related Bill today, our minds must turn to the families and friends of the 96 victims of the Hillsborough disaster 10 years ago. That goes without saying, but I should like to place my sympathy on record.

In declaring various of my interests, I hope to demonstrate to the House why I have a keen and long-standing interest in the issues that we are debating. I am chairman of the Football Trust, patron of the National Federation of Football Supporters Clubs, chairman of the all-party sports group, author of "Labour's Charter for Football" and a member of Liberty. I am, of course, speaking in my own capacity today.

After many years of campaigning for action on these important issues, I should, under normal circumstances, be jumping for joy to see the Bill introduced today. It draws on much of the thinking set out in "Labour's Charter for Football", Labour's policy document on football, published before the last election. It will go a long way towards stamping out hooligan behaviour among a minority of so-called football supporters.

The charter was the result of extensive consultation with interested parties. It received the endorsement of the Football Association, the Premier league, the Football League, the Professional Footballers Association, the National Federation of Football Supporters, the Football Supporters' Association, the Football Trust and many others. It highlighted the need for greater use of restriction orders for those convicted of football-related offences and encouraged co-operation with other European Governments in stamping out hooliganism.

The charter was the first document to highlight the inadequacy of the law on racist chanting, and it pledged that the new Labour Government would tighten the law on the chanting of obscene and racist remarks to cover individual transgressions and provocations of players and supporters. That proposal was later endorsed by the football task force, and it is in clause 9 of the Bill.

In common with the Bill, the charter recommended an increase in football-related offences and powers to allow the police to deal adequately with ticket touts. The charter also recommended the setting up of a task force, and one was established immediately after the Government came to power, albeit in a different form from that envisaged in the charter.

I have no intention of being churlish this morning, but it is important that the House should not forget those historical facts. It goes without saying that I believe the Bill to be a huge step in the right direction. It rightly seeks to redress serious imbalances and to close loopholes in the law on hooliganism, racist chanting and ticket touting, all of which were spelled out in our promises to the nation before the general election.

I must, however, chide my Front-Bench colleagues by registering disappointment, even disbelief, that such a valuable piece of legislation, developed and promoted by Labour, has been handed on a plate to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford. In my 29 years in the House, I cannot recollect an occasion on which such a popular Bill drawn up by a Government has been passed over to the Opposition.

Mr. Burns: May I explain matters? I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I have not sought to make any cheap party political capital out of the Bill. I fully acknowledge the help and support given me by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), on a Bill that the hon. Gentleman is right to say has arisen from Government consultation.

I was fortunate enough to come sixth in the ballot. Although Labour Members were ahead of me, they decided, rightly—I do not criticise them at all—to introduce Bills closer to their personal interests. It would have been terrible if a Bill of this importance had not had a chance to get on to the statute book this year because we could not find an hon. Member high enough in the ballot to give it a speedy passage through the House.

Mr. Pendry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I do not blame him at all. He is extremely lucky. I was merely trying to say that the Bill is so important that the Government should have found time for it in their legislative programme. Far from blaming the hon. Gentleman for picking up the Bill, I think he should go down on bended knee to my hon. Friend the Minister for giving him his opportunity.

The hon. Gentleman is popular on both sides of the House, and no one doubts his motives. However, I am surprised that he has taken up the issue, particularly because, to my knowledge, he has raised football only twice in the House. One was to attack one of my ministerial colleagues on a football-related matter. The other was to criticise the pools companies on the eve of the introduction of the national lottery, stating:

> "They are organising a self-motivated, self-interested special pleading to defend their special interests and privileged position."—[*Official Report*, 25 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 699.]

In the light of the financial contribution that the pools companies have made—channelling money into football and transforming our stadiums and therefore, almost by definition, combating the problems that we are discussing—many people would think that that was a disgraceful remark.

While I am on the subject, I am also concerned at the tone of the press release that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford issued on 31 March, on Conservative central office paper. As the House knows, the contents of the Bill are the result of a wide-ranging public consultation exercise carried out by the Labour party and the Home Office. I was greatly perturbed to read the press release, which talked of the purpose of "my Bill", as though the hon. Gentleman and the Conservative party had made a real and meaningful contribution to its composition—

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman's comments sound to me like sour grapes. Also, it sounds as though he is making them because he would rather be sitting where the Minister for Sport is sitting and he feels bitter about it.

Mr. Pendry: I am not directing this at the Minister anyway and it is not sour grapes because I am sure that

Ministers endorsed our charter too. I was merely pointing out something to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford. That intervention was untimely—it could have been made a little earlier perhaps, but not then. I was about to say that I am always prepared to give praise where praise is due. Who am I to dispute the ancient scripture—joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth? I am saying that the legislation is well thought out and that that owes more to Labour than to the Conservatives.

Mr. Maclean: I do not criticise the hon. Gentleman, but the difficulty is the convention that we all believe, say or pretend that every private Member's Bill is invented exclusively by the Member concerned. Perhaps it may help the hon. Gentleman if I remind him that two or three weeks ago, a Minister issued a press release in which the Government tried to take credit for a private Member's Bill on the day on which it was considered in the House. There was a row in the Chamber.

If we are to continue with the convention, although the Government may have a large part to play in assisting such Bills, we must continue to give private Members all the credit for them. If the Government start to take credit, some of us will think it legitimate to block the Bills because they are Government business.

Mr. Pendry: That point is well taken.

Mr. Burns: I must clear up two matters. First, my press release of 31 March is on Conservative party paper, but that is because I happen to be an Opposition spokesman, so I am entitled to use our press office to put out my comments. Secondly, the press release mentions the purpose of my Bill and continues,

"on which I have worked closely with Kate Hoey MP, the parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office."

Perhaps I may reassure the hon. Gentleman that I do not want to make party political gain out of this matter. When discussing the Bill with the media or anyone else, I have always made it plain that the hon. Lady—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have given the hon. Gentleman some leeway, but interventions should be brief. He will have an opportunity to rebut any case made against him later.

Mr. Pendry: I think that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford made his point, but may I settle the matter? He said that he had made no political capital out of the Bill. I have spoken to two sponsors of the Bill, who were not aware of the press release, nor were they aware that the hon. Gentleman was seeking to extend the Bill in Committee in a way with which they may not have agreed. The hon. Gentleman may wish to take that argument on board.

Clearly, the Bill draws widely on other legislation since 1975. There have been more than 40 separate primary and secondary legislative measures on football—some have already been mentioned—including the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975, the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol Etc.) Act 1985, the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987, the Football Spectators Act 1989, the Football (Offences) Act 1991 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Therefore it is unfortunate that we require further primary legislation to back our efforts to eradicate the hooligan problem, but the fact remains that violence inside domestic football grounds has largely been eliminated—certainly from the higher levels of the sport. There are various reasons for that success and the introduction of all-seater stadiums and closed circuit television have been key developments.

There has been a dramatic transformation of the game, thanks in large part to the dedicated work of the Football Trust following the Taylor report. We now have the finest stadiums in Europe, if not the world. Every division of football has grounds of which we can be proud and I am sure that the Minister for Sport will find that an ace card in his determined efforts to bring the 2006 world cup competition to these shores.

While much in the Bill is to be welcomed, I must voice a note of caution about the possible implications. I never thought that I would share my worries with the right hon. Members for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), and the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant). However, I am sure that we all share the common goal of making football a safer pastime for the genuine supporter—some of the measures are disproportionately severe given the size and nature of the problem and could affect the innocent supporter as much as the persistent hooligan.

Several areas of the Bill are of particular concern. Clause 1(2) proposes the lowering of the burden of proof for the issue of banning orders. The courts will be asked to issue orders if they are

"satisfied that there are reasonable grounds to believe"

that issuing the orders would be likely to prevent violence or disorder. That proposal would clearly diminish the normal criminal standard of proof. It is also worrying that, under clause 1(3)(b) an international banning order can still be made when an absolute discharge has been ordered.

Potentially more troublesome are the proposed requirements set out in clause 3 to surrender passports prior to international matches. Clearly, I am not alone in harbouring doubts about the legality of such a proposal. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford said that he had taken legal advice, but perhaps he should take further advice on whether that measure would contravene article 12 of the international convention on civil and political rights.

Finally, the proposals detailed in clause 4 on increasing the duration of banning orders, to between six and 10 years for someone who has served a custodial sentence and three to five years for convictions without such a sentence, would clearly restrict the discretion of the courts to decide on the appropriate length of a banning order. Also, their legality in the face of freedom of movement, expression and association as guaranteed by the European convention on human rights and EU law is questionable.

The additional proposal that no application for a reconsideration of the duration of the order could be considered before the minimum period had passed seems mean spirited considering the various changes in personal circumstances that are likely to occur—illness or bereavement spring to mind.

I would also welcome a ministerial response on ticket touting. While I very much welcome the provision in clause 10 to prevent touting for matches outside the

[Mr. Pendry]

United Kingdom, which would clearly add to segregation and policing problems at international matches, we still need to do more to tackle touting at domestic football matches.

With many other hon. Members I took a leading role in the campaign from the Opposition Benches to ensure that provision was made for the outlawing of ticket touting at all football matches. That was, of course, a recommendation of Lord Justice Taylor in his report into the Hillsborough disaster, yet the previous Government dragged their feet on adopting it into law. The measure finally became law in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, some five years later.

However, as originally stated in Labour's charter for football, I remain concerned that the police and the courts are not implementing that provision. It is clear to those of us who regularly attend matches that, sadly, touting is flourishing with so many matches being sell-outs.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman has infinitely more experience of football and the history of ticket touting than me, even though I had the ministerial brief on it; I was grateful for his advice at the time. Can he confirm that a large part of the problem at the world cup in France was the explosion of ticket touting on the internet? I doubt whether any Bill could deal with that. What can be done about it?

Mr. Pendry: The right hon. Gentleman is correct. I do not know what can be done. The House should share his concern. I hope that the Minister will seek advice on how to tackle the problem.

Mr. Fabricant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: I wish to proceed. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman before. I love him dearly. On second thoughts, I should like that remark to be struck from the record.

Touts conduct shady activity outside grounds and deny ordinary fans access to tickets at prices that they can afford, and, most importantly, their activities can lead to a breakdown of segregation in grounds, with serious implications for crowd control. Can the Minister confirm that her Department's guidance to police reinforces the need for them to use the powers already at their disposal to arrest those who tout outside grounds? Can she confirm, not necessarily today, the number of arrests and prosecutions in the five years since the provision was enacted?

Another issue on which the hon. Member for West Chelmsford might comment has come to my attention. His press release mentioned extending banning orders during the Committee stage to what he describes as unconvicted hooligans. I have discussed that with some of the Bill's sponsors who did not know that that was his intention. I understand that he has not discussed the Bill with some of them. I think that that was a mistake and I hope that he will do so before the Committee stage because I know that they would like to discuss that aspect. Many hon. Members think that some of the people covered would be considered innocent. Those of us who witnessed at first hand the scenes at Marseilles saw how fans trying to steer clear of crowd trouble could easily have been interpreted by police as participants in a running battle. What are the Minister's intentions? Was she consulted by the hon. Gentleman?

I support any measures to stamp out the mindless violence that has plagued the game too often in the past. Closing loopholes on racist chanting and ticket touting is long overdue and to be applauded. We have made those proposals ourselves. I therefore welcome the Bill's intention to bring the different legislation together in one Act. I hope that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will allay my fears on the issues that I have raised. With those fears addressed, I wish the Bill a speedy passage. With appropriate measures such as the Bill in place, the case for this nation as a fitting host for the 2006 world cup will be even stronger. I wish the Minister for Sport and his team the very best of good fortune in bringing that event to this country.

10.34 am

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on his good fortune in introducing the Bill and on the articulate and courteous way in which he explained it. Like him and the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), I remember with sadness what happened at Hillsborough 10 years ago and send my condolences to those still suffering from those terrible events. Football hooliganism is still with us, as we saw at Villa Park on Wednesday after the thrilling match between Arsenal and Manchester United when 700 fans invaded the pitch. The Bill is timely because we can start to tighten and strengthen the law on football offences.

I should perhaps declare my footballing interests. I have a league team, Swindon Town, and a non-league team, Cheltenham Town. They are both known as "The Robins" and, touch wood, the way things are going, I may soon have two league teams. Cheltenham Town are top of the Conference; they will no doubt now lose their last five games. I have seen both at Wembley. I am sorry that the Secretary of State is not here, but I saw Swindon Town in the 1969 league cup final against Arsenal. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) will no doubt remember that as well. The score was 3:1 after extra time, and two Don Rogers goals saw the third division go home with the cup. I also saw Swindon at the 1993 play-offs, when they got into the Premiership for one glorious season. Most famously, last year, Cheltenham Town visited Wembley to win the FA trophy against Southport.

Mr. Caplin: The hon. Gentleman said that the Bill would help tackle what happened at Villa Park on Wednesday night. I am a neutral, but I saw not a pitch invasion—I will discuss those if I get the chance to speak—but a celebration by Manchester United fans.

Mr. Jones: I accept the hon. Gentleman's perception of what happened, but I know that the police felt that their job was made more difficult by 700 fans coming on to

the pitch. It is not helpful for fans to go on pitches in any sport. In Australia, there is a $5,000 fine for entering the cricket arena in a test match.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman might like to know that in Australia recent cases involving streakers have not been prosecuted. I am not sure what lesson the Australian courts have for us there.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that detail. I am not sure whether it is in order to discuss streakers at cricket matches in a debate on football legislation; in any event, I doubt whether there will be much streaking in this weather.

Returning to the glories of Cheltenham Town, I wish that the debate was taking place next week. The Town need six points to secure promotion to the Football League for the first time. They have two league games before then, as well as tomorrow's FA trophy semi-final, after which they hope to go to Wembley to defend the trophy in May.

I support the main thrust of this good Bill. I want to consider clauses 9 and 10. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford showed his normal courtesy in explaining his desire to amend the Bill to provide for international football banning orders for people without convictions. I have concerns about that idea, but I am content for him to table the amendment so that it can be debated fully in Committee.

Clause 9 deals with indecent or racist chanting. I abhor racism, with good reason. In 1992, when I was first elected to the House, my Conservative opponent was Lord Taylor of Warwick. That attracted considerable media attention and put Cheltenham in the spotlight. Some disgraceful comments by certain individuals were found through deep media interest and gave the town a bad name. I tried to fend off that sort of nonsense. I remember an interview with the *Daily Mail* during which I was asked, "Aren't you going to win this election because of racism?" I replied with one sentence: "Racists are bigots who should not share our planet." They should not share our football terraces either.

I was grateful to Professor David Butler of Nuffield college, the well-known psephologist, who after the 1997 election wrote as follows:

"Thank you for proving that the 1992 result in Cheltenham was not a racialist freak."

I can confirm to the House that people in Cheltenham are not racists. The chanting that we get at Whaddon Road when Cheltenham Town is playing is sometimes slightly obscene, and we need to do something about that. I have never heard any racist chants.

Obscene chanting does lessen the attraction of football to many, particularly women and children. I shall give an example. As I mentioned, Cheltenham Town was last year's FA trophy winner. The fans have a song congratulating the manager, Stevie Cotterill, who used to play for Wimbledon but was born in Cheltenham. It goes like this:

"Stevie Cotterill's magic,

He wears a magic hat.

When he saw the trophy, he said 'I'm having that.'

We score goals with our left foot and we score them with our right, and when we score at Wembley we're . . ."

The words should, of course, be "Cheltenham dynamite". Sadly, the fans put an obscenity into the last line. I wish that they would not do that. I hope that if the team gets to Wembley again we shall hear the proper version of the song without obscenities.

It takes only one person to start trouble or to shout an offensive or racist chant. I have been observing fans at Cheltenham Town and at other grounds recently because I was aware that the Bill was to be introduced to the House. I was at the Kingstonian ground last Saturday for the FA trophy semi-final first leg. It was interesting to note that individuals in the stand started a chant. They were shouting something. Occasionally it was picked up by others. It was almost as if they were cheerleaders. More often than not there was a swear word or an obscenity included.

In proceeding with the Bill and in tightening legislation we must be careful not to outlaw the wit of some football fans. There are some very funny observations that turn into chants. A few weeks ago Cheltenham Town was playing Kettering Town, which was then at the top of the Conference league. It was a top-of-the-table battle. With a few minutes to go, Cheltenham was leading 3:0. A chant started:

"You've got three minutes left at the top."

There was then a countdown, with the chant:

"You've got two minutes left at the top."

That was followed by:

"You've got injury time left at the top."

That was witty.

The talented and high-scoring Stevenage Borough striker Carl Alford was called Bouncy Castle when he came to Cheltenham because he was a big and well-covered individual. We should not do anything to outlaw that sort of thing. However, when Dover Athletic visited Cheltenham the chant went up:

"You're French and you know you are."

Technically, that is racist. We should try to clamp down on that sort of chant.

We need the restraint of players when it comes to swearing on the pitch. A spectator who is quite close to the pitch can hear players swearing not only at themselves for missing a pass or a goal, but at officials. We need to try to stamp out abuse of officials. By all means point out that referees need glasses, and I think that more training for referees would be a good idea. However, the obscenities that are hurled at referees sometimes have the result that if there is 50:50 decision to be made, the outcome will be less likely to be in favour of the side that has been responsible for abuse.

I move on to recommendation 22 on page 19 of the "Review of Football-Related Legislation" that relates to alcohol. I note that the Bill does not include a related provision, and I hope that such a provision will not be inserted in Committee. I should declare an interest as the chairman of the all-party parliamentary beer group, or club, as it is described on headed paper. The recommendation reads:

"That legislative provision be introduced enabling chief officers of police to make application to the local licensing authority for the issue of an order with the consent of the Secretary of State to restrict the sale of alcohol in specified areas or the whole area within their licensing area for a specified period of time; and prevent the public consumption and carrying of alcohol in those areas during that time."

[Mr. Jones]

If we were to introduce such a provision, it would have a devastating effect on the livelihood of those who sell alcohol in the areas concerned. It would also infringe the ability of those who have no intention of going to a football match or involving themselves in any illegal activity to buy a bottle of wine or a six-pack of beer to consume, for example, while watching "Grandstand" or enjoying a barbecue in the garden. We must ensure that we do not infringe the liberties of those who are not football fans or football match attenders.

The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), who intervened on the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), the former Labour spokesman on sport, was absolutely right to say that there has been a huge increase in internet traffic for ticket touting and for everything else as well. Internet use is to be encouraged but ticket touting is to be discouraged.

Mr. Fabricant: I am genuinely confused on this issue. I can understand that ticket touting outside a stadium should perhaps not be encouraged. As I understand it from my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), people turn up at a match, do not get a ticket and then cause disorder. If people buy a ticket in advance from the internet, what is the problem? They then have a ticket and will go to the match. If they do not have a ticket, they do not go. I do not see a problem in buying a ticket from the internet.

Mr. Jones: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. If he is a member of the Committee that considers the Bill—I hope that he will be—he will be able to advance that point of view. It is an issue that we shall need to discuss in some detail in Committee. My view is that any sort of ticket touting is to be deplored and prevented.

Mr. Fabricant: Why?

Mr. Forth: It is entrepreneurship.

Mr. Jones: The right hon. Gentleman talks about entrepreneurship—

Mr. Burns: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the problems associated with ticket touting is that it breaks down the segregation rules and causes problems in the stadium?

Mr. Jones: That is the answer to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant). While there is the potential for violence and other disorder at football matches, segregation will have to continue. In future, in an ideal world, we might be able to overcome the problems of violence and other forms of disorder, in which case the internet entrepreneurship about which we have heard may be permissible. When the Bill is considered in Committee, I think that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will have to allow some time for the entire issue of internet touting to be discussed.

Mr. Maclean: Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the point that I am about to make and tell me whether I am entirely wrong? Most right hon. and hon. Members heap opprobrium on ticket touts but we seem to forget the people who supply tickets to them. Will they not often be directors and other members of clubs who have a ticket allocation? If ticket touting is to be such a vile offence, does the hon. Gentleman believe that action should be taken against those who have supplied the touts in addition to the touts who are reselling the tickets?

Mr. Jones: We need to examine the chain, from where tickets come from to where they go. Ticket touting is not, of course, confined to football. For example, there is a fine racecourse at Cheltenham. Disgracefully it is just outside my constituency. In effect, the Boundary Commission moved it out after the general election. Dozens and dozens of people are selling and buying tickets on the day of a meeting. That is the entrepreneurship of which the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) spoke. I think that they are genuine tickets. However, I do not think that they are supplied through the racecourse company. I know that there are allocations of tickets for football matches to directors and even to players, which sometimes find their way on to the black market. We need to consider that in Committee.

My 13-year-old daughter drags me to football matches whenever she has the opportunity. Tomorrow, she is taking me to Whaddon Road to see the second leg of the FA trophy semi-final—we are 2:2 at present and hoping to go to Wembley again. She says that half-time exists to remind of us what life would be like without football. The Bill will tighten the law so that some people—the moronic few—will have not only half-time without football, but whole seasons without football. That is right, because football is a great game; it is our national game and I support a clampdown on the moronic minority to bring hooligans and thugs to justice. We need to clean up the game and attract more fans, including women and children—whole families. That would support our argument for hosting the world cup in the UK. I wish the Bill well.

10.51 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I am glad to have the opportunity to take part in the debate and congratulate the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on introducing the Bill.

Like other hon. Members who have spoken today, I cannot contribute to the debate without first referring to the 10th anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster. We must remember that disaster, as we did in the minute's silence yesterday. We must understand that there are deep-seated concerns about the policing on that day, and that they are relevant to our consideration of the Bill. The issue has still not gone away. I realise that there is a continuing sense of unfinished business among all those who lost loved ones in that terrible disaster.

The House has a responsibility to those football fans and fans everywhere; we must do all that is in our power to make safety our number one concern in the nation's number one sport. Above all, we owe that to football fans: although the players perform on the pitch, the fans are the mainstay of the game and we are concerned about them in this debate.

As other hon. Members have pointed out, it is now right to pay tribute to the huge progress that has been made in improving safety at football matches—progress that we

would not have dreamed was possible 10 years ago. We have improved the safety of football stadiums and made football more family friendly—that is especially important. Football is an important game for all fans, but we should not lose sight of the fact that many people go with their families—mothers, fathers and children. More women now go to games and it is essential that we make football safer.

I am proud to be a vice-chair of the all-party group on football, like the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). That group has played more than its part in the improvements that have taken place. I had to get in a plug for the group; it is the largest all-party parliamentary group and makes the widest possible contribution to the debate on all football-related issues.

In considering the merits of the Bill, we should take stock of those improvements. Lord Justice Taylor's report did much to address safety concerns inside grounds. As the consultation document on the most welcome review of football-related legislation pointed out, legislation introduced in the early 1990s has helped to make football hooliganism inside domestic grounds largely a thing of the past. Here, I must congratulate the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) on her role in keeping up the momentum on that important review. I want to emphasise the word "largely", because there have been some worrying incidents recently. Although we heard from the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) earlier that football hooliganism is decreasing, that does not mean that we should not deal with it when it does occur. The incidents that we have seen this week should serve as a stark and timely reminder that we can never afford to be complacent about the changes that have been made. Of course, it is true that events in France at the world cup last year acted as a catalyst for the consensus on the Bill.

One of the changes that Hillsborough forced us to make was the introduction of new policing arrangements at football matches. Like many hon. Members who have referred to that matter, I, too, have been privileged to attend briefings and debriefings, and have observed policing arrangements throughout matches. I went with the football group to see the arrangements that were made during Euro 96 and the changes that were made at that time—for example, the use of closed circuit television. I regularly attend police briefings in my own constituency at Port Vale and am aware of the progress made by the police, who are working alongside stewards and clubs throughout the country to maintain higher safety standards so that football matches are safer for fans.

There are many lessons to be learned from the policing of Euro 96 that should stand us in good stead if we continue with our bid to host the world cup in 2006. It is clear that a tremendous effort is being made by everyone connected with football to ensure that in 2006 the world cup takes place in this country. We must address the remaining problems relating to hooliganism if we are to have the best possible chance of success in that bid.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made welcome adjustments to the pools levy to contribute more money to the essential financing of the ground and safety improvement work undertaken by the Football Trust. That work could not have been afforded by those clubs that are outside the winner-takes-all Premier League. Many clubs are grateful to the trust for the grants that have been awarded. In my constituency, we recently received a grant of £2.5 million to build a new stand. That is one example of many large amounts that have been spent. Those improvements have not come about by accident; they have resulted from sustained work and the vision of a large number of people and organisations, including the football authorities. I pay tribute to the work of the Football Trust—to its past chairmen, its present chairman and its officers. That includes my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), who is in the Chamber today to contribute to the debate, as he always does when football is discussed.

We have come a long way, but we have not yet come far enough. The Bill is an important step along the road. In a sense, it is a return fixture in the debate on new clause 10 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Bill. That debate took place on 22 June last year in the aftermath of the events in France. I realise that Opposition Members wanted to make improvements. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary acknowledged various proposals that were made at that time, but felt that it was not right to introduce legislation for a quick fix and that there should be proper consultation. That consultation has now taken place and 500 responses have been returned. The detailed proposals that we are debating have arisen from that. It is right to proceed by building that form of consensus to ensure that when we make changes, those changes will properly address the continuing concerns about hooliganism.

The Bill is right to target racist abuse. We are now in the aftermath of the Lawrence report and we must do what we can to continue to kick racism out of football. The Bill on its own will not deal with that, but many initiatives to target racism are taking place in community football throughout the country. Many prominent footballers are taking the lead by acting as mentors and that is important.

It is also right that the Bill should tighten specific powers relating to hooligans. I entirely support the measures that would give the courts powers to impose longer restriction orders and make international and domestic football—

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke–on–Trent, North (Ms Walley) to acquit me of discourtesy, but the rules of the House dictate that points of order must be raised on the dot of 11 o'clock. Has Madam Speaker received a request either from the Foreign Office to make a statement on the bombing last night of Montenegro—a state that has tried to distance itself from President Milosevic—or from the Ministry of Defence on what instructions the Secretary of State has issued to British ships of the Navy, should they come into contact with those Russian ships and submarines now in the Mediterranean having passed through the Bosphorus?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have had no notification of any statement.

Ms Walley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I entirely understand the on-going concern and it is quite right that the House should be at all times the place where such issues are discussed.

Let me return to the Bill. It is important that the courts should have the powers to impose longer restriction orders and deal with international and domestic football banning

[Ms Walley]

orders. If we can deter hooligans by making it clear that they will be required to report to specific police stations on the match days of their home and international teams; if we can give the courts powers to impose tighter controls and extend those powers to the Crown court; if we can succeed in requiring courts to make a presumption in favour of imposing an order and, if a court does not make an order, require it to explain why not; and if we can extend the period during which people can be charged with football-related offences and apply them over a longer period of time, we shall have made further progress in the interests of football safety for all.

I see that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) has now left the Chamber—perhaps he has been given the red card by his hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford, who anticipated his right hon. Friend's kicking this Bill into touch, as he has so many other important Bills. However, I have to give a word of warning to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford: I would be extremely concerned if, in Committee, we went further down the road of giving greater powers to the police in cases where convictions have not been confirmed. Only in the past few weeks, I have dealt with a constituency complaint about police behaviour at a football match. It is important that we exercise great care and take lessons from such cases and from Hillsborough as well.

We have to address such concerns squarely, and I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's honesty in giving advance notice that he might go down that road in Committee. It is an issue that all the members of the Committee should take into consideration. We cannot simply hand over powers to the police where no offence has been committed. We should allow nothing that returns to the House after Committee stage to compromise our commitment to civil liberty and to the European convention on human rights. I presume that the extensive discussions that will take place with my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department will draw on all available expertise to ensure that, if such a proposal is mooted in Committee, the right advice is taken into account. We have to ensure that safeguards are in place.

All that presupposes that we can deal with continuing problems of football-related disorder through a Bill of only a few clauses. If passed, the Bill will make a huge difference, but the House must understand that the problems facing football will not cease simply because the Bill has been enacted. What about effective enforcement and policing resources to cover existing responsibilities, as well as those new responsibilities that the Bill would impose? Only last weekend, one of my constituents witnessed an extremely ugly incident en route from a football match, and he has yet to be convinced that the police response to that incident was adequate. We have to ensure that existing legislation is being properly implemented and enforced and that we are monitoring it. At the other end of the spectrum, there will be further cause for concern if complaints persist about over-zealous policing at matches. What is being done to promote proper training of police offices who carry out those duties? That is an issue that should be addressed in legislation.

I fear that, sooner or later, we shall have to address the enormous frustration that is welling up inside football and that, in some cases, is nearing the point where it breaks through in clubs whose fans are becoming more impatient as they see the success that is attached to so many of the Premier elite clubs eluding their own club. The Nationwide league and the network of clubs stretching the length and breadth of our country are unique—they do not exist anywhere else. Local passions and loyalties matter to an extent that is unknown in other parts of Europe.

The inequalities that have swept over the national game ever since the break away of the Premiership have to be acknowledged: we must recognise that there are now as many clubs facing the wall as there are successful clubs riding high on the crest of the wave, with everything to play for and undreamed of riches and rewards for their players. Everyone should be concerned: football players, many of whom now demand huge wages; the football task force; my hon. Friend the Minister, who understands football; my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who showed only last week that he will uphold the public interest as opposed to wider business and broadcasting concerns; my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, whom I was pleased to see present earlier and who commands great respect in the world of football and wears his love of football on his shirtsleeve; and the Government as a whole.

Frustration at the bad behaviour of hooligans who have no part to play in football and whose actions wreck the sport for the rest of us will be largely addressed if the Bill is passed. However, while supporting the Bill, we should be in no doubt that we shall have to organise a return fixture in the near future. We must address in greater detail commercial inequalities, the wider implications of the current Office of Fair Trading inquiry, and the European dimension to further proposed mergers involving broadcasters and the other business interests which combine to boost the fortunes of a few successful clubs at the expense of the majority of smaller clubs.

Let us not forget that football is first and foremost a sport. I hope that we can make progress and that the Bill will take us one step closer to establishing a level playing field for football. However, I suspect that, in due course, the House will have to consider having a regulator to oversee the many other issues that affect our national game.

11.7 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Last Sunday, my alarm went off at 4 o'clock in the morning. I got up and took my youngest son, Tom, to London to put him on a team coach—team coach? I wish—a supporters coach to Villa Park. He chose to spend his 18th birthday watching his team, the Arsenal, play Manchester United. Many hours later, a young man came back happy and exhilarated having had a great day out and having seen a tremendous game of football. I have to say that, after Wednesday, he was not quite so happy—I am told that my household is still in mourning, although it is the measure of his sort of supporter that he concedes, as all must, that it was a fair result.

I am grateful to my son and I mention him and his exuberance because it is infectious. My sporting religious preference has always been for the summer game, played with bat and leather; and, for many years, for winter

entertainment I turned to the game played with an oval ball. I enjoyed, if that is the right word, many of the prejudices of those who support those two games rather than soccer, which some rather precociously describe as the national game. My wife and I used to own a home within walking distance of Craven Cottage, and my prejudices were heightened by the fact that, on home match days, it was impossible for those who lived in the area to park within 100 miles of their own home and that, for some time after the game, the streets were filled with fairly raucous and—to some—fairly intimidating singing and chanting crowds, some of whom were over-excited by an excess of alcohol.

That is where I came from until Tom—at 13, I think—discovered, for no reason that I can understand, the Arsenal football club and latched on to it as his team. His enthusiasm was infectious. I bought him a ticket for a Boxing day match at Highbury and took him—because someone had to—to see the Arsenal play Queen's Park Rangers. I am delighted to report that the Arsenal won on that occasion.

That experience was a revelation. I found a stadium full of enthusiasts in good humour who supported two separate teams and who were, in the main, perfectly prepared to get on well with each other. The stadium—I appreciate that it is a Premier league stadium—was equipped with far better facilities than I had anticipated. Several times since then, I have enjoyed similar experiences with my son. We have even attended some minor league games. For example, a year ago, Margate looked momentarily as though it might become a giant killer by beating Fulham. Special stands were erected at Margate football ground. The ground was packed and the gate money was, to a team like Margate, riches beyond the dreams of avarice. Sadly, that dream ended fairly swiftly.

I agree that there is a problem, but I think that we must put it into proportion. As one who has come late to the enjoyment of this game, I get the impression that the overwhelming majority of men and women, boys and girls who enjoy soccer do so with tremendous enthusiasm and great good humour in a spirit of genuine sportsmanship. They wish to cause—and to see caused—no trouble whatsoever. We must remember that throughout this debate.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) referred to the Arsenal-Manchester United replay on Wednesday and the "pitch invasion" that happened afterwards as if that were football hooliganism. I share the view expressed by the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin): we actually saw Manchester United supporters showing tremendous exuberance, enthusiasm and excitement when their team won. I do not condone such actions. I am more than willing to concede that, for those required to police such situations, that kind of pitch invasion is not only undesirable but makes life much more difficult. I do not welcome it at cricket or rugby grounds and I do not welcome it at football grounds—although I do understand it.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend has made the point that I intended to raise. Pitch invasions are common occurrences at rugby grounds after international matches. People may not welcome it, but the pitch invasion is not regarded as a violent criminal activity or a serious problem. The youngsters who exuberantly invade the pitch when their side wins are not potential criminals, and should not be regarded as such.

Mr. Gale: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for reinforcing my point. We must be careful when regulating sporting events—or anything at all, for that matter—that we do not over-regulate to the point where we deny the genuine supporter the right to express genuine support.

I have sat in the north stand at Highbury and some of the people whose company I have shared on those occasions have been robust. Some of the language used would not necessarily be the kind that is spoken at ladies' tea parties in my constituency. However, I hesitate to say that I found it wildly offensive in that context—I refer to the north stand and not to the ladies' tea parties.

Mr. Fabricant: I shall give another Australian example to reinforce my hon. Friend's point that it is a question of degree and how one perceives hooliganism. Would my hon. Friend be surprised to learn that the New South Wales Legislative Assembly is discussing legislation to stop hooliganism at Australian Rules football matches in the form of the Mexican wave? That is what that assembly regards as hooligan behaviour.

Mr. Gale: My hon. Friend makes my point. I understand that the Mexican wave has become part of the game of football. Other hon. Members may find it offensive, but I certainly do not.

We must address some serious issues. I said yesterday—I am surprised to find myself saying it again today—that we are in danger of invoking the law of unintended consequence. I am worried that, unless it is addressed carefully in Committee, the Bill—which my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) has had the good fortune to introduce this morning—will have unintended consequences that may penalise not those whom we wish to penalise but the genuine supporters who go about their lawful and genuine business of supporting their team.

I do not want to see innocent fans either caught up in a riot that is not of their making and branded as football hooligans by accident, or denied the right to travel wherever in the world they wish to support their teams. Of course, I also recognise the right of the majority to enjoy their civil liberties and the peace and quiet of their towns, be it Marseilles or elsewhere. We witnessed totally unacceptable violent scenes in France during the world cup. However, I am not certain that my hon. Friend's Bill seriously addresses any of those issues.

First and foremost, young people—which is what many football supporters are—look to football players as their heroes. There was a time when every inch of wall and ceiling space in my son's bedroom was covered with pictures of one or other members of the team that he supports. I find nothing wrong with that: it is understandable and right. Because those players—it has been said this morning that they are very well paid—are such heroes and are so important, it is vital that they set the finest possible examples. Nothing in this Bill deals with that issue.

It is absolutely vital that players understand the laws of their game and respect the officials who are required to preside, now more than ever, in the glare of not only

[Mr. Gale]

floodlights but television cameras that are able, within 30 seconds, to replay every incident and thus reveal every mistake that human officials indubitably make. That is one of the core problems, and the Bill does not address it.

Although the sentiment behind it may be extremely worthy, I am deeply concerned by the suggestion that banning orders should be imposed against people who have not been convicted of an offence. I dare say that significant numbers of policemen policing the streets of London would dearly love to be able to arrest and lock up people who have not been convicted but whom they know to be villains. However, the law does not allow the police to do that—for a very good reason. As was reiterated yesterday, our criminal justice system is designed fundamentally to protect the interests of the defendant. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) reminded the House yesterday in another context that, in court, the interests of the defendant—who may lose his or her liberty in extreme circumstances—are paramount.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford did not answer my question when I intervened earlier, so I shall ask it again. The National Criminal Intelligence Service performs a vital service in the fight against crime and is very good at gathering information. Should we impose banning orders on the known burglar who is unconvicted, the unconvicted known sex offender or the unconvicted known City fraudster because they might intend to travel to Italy to perpetrate a burglary, to the south of France to commit a sexual offence, or to Geneva to practise financial fraud? Is that what we are saying? That is the logical extension of the proposals. I do not understand how, in a civilised, free democracy, which is dependent on the rule of law, one can say to someone before they have committed an offence, "We think that you will commit an offence, so we shall take away your passport." That is what my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Greenway: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's point, but what would he say if the National Criminal Intelligence Service had video footage of events in Marseilles in which individuals could clearly be seen committing violent acts and causing damage but, because they were returned swiftly to this country, they were never convicted? Would he regard the use of such video footage as a reasonableness test under which a restriction order might be valid?

Mr. Gale: I have to say to my hon. Friend that that may be a case for changing the law to allow those people to be prosecuted and convicted in the United Kingdom, and therefore banned, but it is not, in itself, a case for instituting a banning order.

Before my hon. Friend takes that argument any further, he should pay attention to the point, made by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), that many people were caught up in riots in Marseilles through no fault of their own and wanted to get away. If any of those people had been seen throwing a punch, it might well have been because someone with evil intent had just belted them and they were defending themselves. That person could find themselves on the wrong side of a banning order, just as easily as could the person whom my hon. Friend and I would wish to prevent from causing further trouble.

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That happened not only in Marseilles but in Toulon, where a friend of mine picked up a table to defend himself. I could well imagine a camera picking him out while he was doing so, and, under these provisions, he could have had his passport withdrawn when he was only trying to defend himself against football rioters.

Mr. Gale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. I shall move on because I am conscious of the time.

Mr. Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): Returning to the hon. Gentleman's analogy of a burglar, let me say that I agree with him that we would not want to stop people travelling abroad on holiday because they had been convicted of burglary in the past. However, I am sure that he would agree that, if we had information that such a person was part of a gang that intended to commit burglary on the continent—that is how football hooligans work—that person should be prevented from travelling abroad.

Mr. Gale: There is no provision in law for that to happen, although the hon. Gentleman may want to change the law to that effect. We are proposing to single out supporters of a particular game—we are not discussing cricket or rugby supporters—and apply to them a specially created legal provision.

The police in my constituency tell me that, if they could lock up a certain dozen or so people overnight, that would lead to a reduction, overnight, of the burglaries in the area because most of those are committed, or instigated, by that small number of people. However, the law does not permit that because we have a justice system that is still based on the presumption that somebody is innocent until proven guilty. If we are to change that basis, we must carefully think through the consequences of doing so.

Mr. Burns: I certainly agree with that sentiment, but does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill's proposals are not unique in British law? Such powers already exist in cases of non-convicted people on bail and non-convicted people who are suspected of being likely to take their child out of the country.

Mr. Gale: I heard my hon. Friend use those two examples in his opening remarks, and I heard, with equal clarity, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), a former Home Office Minister, demonstrate clearly why there is a fundamental difference between those provisions and what my hon. Friend and other hon. Members are proposing.

There are two positive aspects that the Bill does not address, but that should be dealt with in any legislation on this subject. The fundamental ingredients of good practice are good facilities and good stadiums. To make the point brutally, if one treats people like pigs, some of them are likely to behave like pigs. Most, if not all, first-class stadiums are all-seater and most offer good sanitation and adequate lavatory facilities that do not become clogged and revolting at half-time. Most offer

good food at reasonable prices and good drink outlets capable of serving modest quantities to large numbers of people at peak times.

Those factors enhance people's enjoyment of the game and diminish the possibility of them feeling anger and frustration. Facilities are a key issue that must be addressed, not only for football but for all sports in this and other countries. We have to seek enhancement at every level, not only at Premier league grounds, of the facilities available to those who, at the end of the day, pay the wages of the footballers, cricketers or rugby players. It grieves me that so much money has been wasted—on the wretched dome, for example—that could have been spent usefully to enhance facilities for young sports men and women and the fans that seek to enjoy the games. In considering the Bill, the House should take a long, hard look at the provision of facilities.

The second, crucial aspect, which has been mentioned several times this morning, is ticketing. I am fortunate to have a constituency that places me within easy reach of France. I have significant numbers of friends in France; I choose to spend my holidays there and I visit the country regularly. In the run-up to the previous world cup series, the ticketing arrangements—never mind in the United Kingdom, but in France itself—were a joke. The manner in which the allocation of tickets for key matches was handled was outrageous. I suspect that one of the problems that led to violence was the anger and frustration expressed by genuine supporters who felt that they were being ripped off.

If any game, but particularly soccer, is to diminish violence still further—that is what we all want—ticketing much be managed properly. There is nothing wrong in using the internet to deal with that. I do not particularly like the fact that touts can charge inflated prices for tickets at the gates of Arsenal or Wimbledon football grounds, at Lords or anywhere else, but there is a free market element in ticketing that we should not overlook. The important consideration is that fans should have proper access to the tickets so that they know whether they will be able to get into the ground on the day at a fair price.

I heard the hon. Member for Cheltenham say that he believed that segregation is necessary for the foreseeable future. I believe in integration at sports grounds. When I went, a few weeks ago, to Bath to watch Bath play Newcastle at rugby, I was not segregated—nobody told me where I had to sit or stand. I went and watched the game and I was surrounded by as many black and white scarves as ones for the local team. There was no problem.

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): That is a different life.

Mr. Gale: It is no good the Minister for Sport muttering that that is a different life. It should not be different and it does not need to be different. I, for one, will not accept the perpetuation of that different life. One of the ways of getting to grips with that problem and achieving integration and better behaviour inside the grounds—I accept that not all problems occur inside the grounds—is to have better ticketing arrangements.

This is a very important Bill. It is far too complex to be allowed to go through this House as a private Member's Bill. The Government should have introduced it, especially since, as has rightly been said, the Minister for Sport and his team have put so much personal effort into the matter. I am saddened that they have not found time to do so. I hope and believe that the Bill will receive radical surgery in Committee. If it does, it may stand a prayer. Unless it does, many of us will find it necessary to oppose Third Reading.

11.30 am

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I am glad to have the opportunity to say a few words on this Bill. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on introducing it. I am one of its sponsors on the Government Benches, but I should make it clear from the outset that I will not be able to serve on the Committee that will consider it because I already serve on the Modernisation Committee, which sits on Wednesday mornings.

It is important that we consider these issues, so as to ensure that we eliminate the harm and tremendous damage that is done at games by a minority of people who call themselves football supporters. It is right to say that most of the problems no longer occur at games. Indeed, one can always tell who is going to cause trouble at a game, because they are the ones who pay very little attention to what is going on on the pitch. They are looking at other things, so one can nearly always identify them when sitting in the stands.

I associate myself with all the comments in this debate on the Hillsborough tragedy and the tributes paid yesterday on the 10th anniversary of it. We shall never forget the grave tragedy at that FA cup semi-final.

I also want to make it clear that I am the secretary of the all-party football group but I am certainly not speaking in that capacity, as that group has not taken a particular view of the Bill. I have been a Burnley supporter for more than 50 years, and recently acquired five shares in the football club. In a true sense, I am now one of Labour's stakeholders. For a number of years, I have also been president of the Burnley Football Club London Supporters Association.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) referred to Margate and dreams. Football is in many ways a game of dreams. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), who should be the hon. Member for Port Vale because she is such a fanatical supporter of the club, as am I of Burnley, referred to the Premier and Nationwide leagues and the spread of clubs. Dreams make football a major participation sport and, of course, the No. 1 spectator sport in this country. We must recognise the tremendous increase over recent years in the number of spectators who go through the gates for Nationwide and Premier games.

I remember Wimbledon playing at Turf Moor in the FA cup 26 years ago. Indeed, when I was at school, I remember seeing the team play Kingstonian in the Athenian league. It came to Burnley as a southern non-league club. Twenty six years later, the once mighty Burnley is in one of the lower divisions, and has been for most of those 26 years, whereas Wimbledon has of course a much better record in the FA cup and the league over that period.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): May I correct my hon. Friend? When Wimbledon played Kingstonian, it was in the Isthmian league.

Mr. Pike: I accept that. I am one of those who never knew which was the Isthmian league and which was the

[Mr. Pike]

Athenian league. I am glad to be corrected, and I am sorry for the slip. As I was saying, the fact that people can dream of moving up divisions makes football such an important game.

When the Government consulted on the review of football-related legislation earlier this year, Burnley football club published my full-page summary of it in the club programme. As most football fans will know, the average football fan who buys a programme reads it from cover to cover, recognising every deliberate mistake and every unintentional one that slips through. People who commented to me following that article—I did not receive many letters on it—said that they strongly supported the measures that the Government were proposing, which were very much along the lines of the Bill.

I received a letter from a constituent, Mr. Leedam, who has written to me on a number of issues. He used to be a very keen football fan but was put off by hooliganism. He used to support Burnley both at home and away. He pointed out—the hon. Member for West Chelmsford made the point that this Bill is particularly trying to address the matter—that problems occur more often away from, rather than inside, grounds. Discussions between Burnley football club and Lancashire police this year revealed that an increased number of games have been designated police-free. In other words, the police take the view that club stewards are fully able to deal with any problems inside the ground and that the police should be present only outside it. It is therefore right that the Bill attempts to address the present problems.

We must ensure that a minority of people do not spoil the name of football and do not create trouble in town centres and elsewhere, so that others are afraid of walking around, doing their Saturday shopping and other things. I stress that problems are caused by the minority, although, unfortunately, we must so often take action to deal with such minorities.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford described additional measures that he might want to introduce. I warn him to be extremely wary in doing so. I have always been quite strong on civil liberty and human rights issues. I have been surprised by some interventions by Opposition Members, whom I would not always regard as the greatest champions of such issues. That shows that we must be very careful. I have looked carefully at the matter and think that, on balance, the Bill goes just about far enough. It strikes a fair balance. In a civilised society, a balance must always be struck between protecting the lives of the many and dealing with the minority in drawing a line on civil liberties. It would be a little dangerous to embark upon some of things that the hon. Gentleman said that he might like to consider in Committee. I say that genuinely; we must be very careful.

Mr. Maclean: I have been looking at the proportionality of the Bill. Last year's National Criminal Intelligence Service figures show that there were 258 criminal offences involving some measure of violence at football matches. The latest Home Office statistics show that crimes of violence against the person totalled 256,000. Does the hon. Gentleman therefore agree that the Bill goes slightly too far?

Mr. Pike: I have great respect for the right hon. Gentleman, who is a former Home Office Minister. I am greatly concerned about all violent crimes. Today, we are discussing one issue, and Mr. Deputy Speaker would not want me to speak on how to deal with the wider picture. I should like us to live in a society where all people should go about their ways without fear of acts of violence. We must consider the matter carefully; I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point.

This year, I went to one away match at Maine Road—I have attended more than one, but I am talking of one that attracted a crowd of more than 30,000. When the match ended, Burnley fans were asked to stay in the ground to allow Manchester City fans to move away, but even when we were told that it was safe to leave, a minority of fans of both sides—not just City fans—were causing major problems. For a short time, I felt extremely worried about whether I could safely reach the place to catch a bus into the centre of Manchester for my return to Burnley. Such problems should not occur.

If, when I am watching Burnley play Bournemouth tomorrow afternoon, we hear that Blackburn are losing their game to Southampton, the news may get the biggest cheer of the afternoon, because nothing will delight us more. I share the typical Burnley supporter's view that Blackburn's relegation would be great news for Burnley, and would deserve a cheer. However, I would not support the idea of throwing missiles and so on. Some years ago, when I sponsored a ball for a friendly game between Burnley and Blackburn Rovers, I went down the road and saw some of the extreme minority throwing bricks from one side to another. That cannot be condoned.

Some of the behaviour of fans travelling abroad does tremendous harm to the country's image abroad. I accept that there are problems in other European countries. I have been in Auxerre in France when a football match has been on and seen problems in that town, so I am under no illusions; I do not believe that such behaviour is solely a British problem. Nevertheless, we must deal with our people. We do not want English fans to give this country a bad name.

Clause 9 deals with indecent and racialist chanting. The other week, I received a letter from a rector of a church who is now not in Burnley but who was a curate at a local church several years ago. In that letter, he complained about the chanting in the family stand. He has been very encouraged by the response that he has had from the club, and the increased stewarding and the action by stewards at following matches. Football at Burnley has always attracted many women supporters, and we must accept that it is much more of a family sport than it used to be. People take their families to matches probably more than at any time in the history of the game. Indecent or racist chants are unacceptable, and I fully support what the police are seeking to do about them.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) that further action must be taken, in this country as well as in relation to international matches, to clamp down on ticket touting. I welcome the Bill's provisions on touting. Tickets for some matches are snapped up, but, as one approaches Wembley for a match, one still sees people selling tickets. The genuine football supporter—the one who bought the season ticket, the one who attends every week—is unable to get a ticket for a semi-final or other important match without paying over the odds.

The hon. Member for North Thanet said that the way in which touting was tackled in France and outside France recently was a fiasco. There is no better way to describe the way in which those tickets were distributed, and we must ensure that that does not happen again.

The Bill is another step in the right direction of ensuring a good name for football in this country. We do not want to allow the minority to destroy it, and we need to tell the minority, both by legislation and in other ways—for example, via football clubs—that we are not prepared to tolerate such behaviour. Burnley football club exercises a policy, which may seem somewhat brutal at times, that anyone who commits a football-related offence is banned for life from Turf Moor. That may be stretching it a bit far, because people may make mistakes, but it is the responsibility of all of us who want football to have a good name to say repeatedly that we are not prepared to tolerate a minority harming it.

I want the 2006 world cup here in this country, and we must ensure that we do everything possible to ensure that English football—and Welsh football, which is also covered by the Bill—is of the best possible standard, and that a minority is not allowed to damage its name.

11.45 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). As president of York City football club, I hope that we are still playing Burnley in the second division next season, and at the moment I think that that is more doubtful from our perspective than from his. I am pleased to be wearing our club tie for this debate.

During the debate on the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill yesterday, I was able to comment in memory of all those youngsters who died at Hillsborough 10 years ago, and I am glad to have the chance to do so again today.

Like one or two other hon. Members, I was not entirely happy with the outcome of proceedings at Villa Park on Wednesday night. I should perhaps try on the Under-Secretary the joke that I tried on her right hon. Friend the Home Secretary yesterday—although it did not seem to work on him. I think it was a pity that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry could not have had as much influence on the outcome of the Arsenal-Manchester United result as he had on other matters affecting Manchester United—which, for the record, I personally welcome.

Other hon. Members spoke of a pitch invasion at Villa Park after the FA cup semi-final on Wednesday night; I agree with them that the fans were celebrating victory, not looking to cause trouble. However, it is not always that way, and I recall one black day at York City football club when, in a promotion season for Sunderland, York beat Sunderland 2:1. If I remember rightly, we were relegated that year as well, and the Sunderland fans invaded the pitch, destroyed the goals and caused mayhem. It is therefore important, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) said, that whatever legislation we bring to the statute book not only is proportionate but provides for the discretion that is obviously needed in such circumstances.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on his success in the ballot. I believe that he has made a wise choice in promoting the Bill—however it came to attract considerable Government support and input. I say that because I believe such issues are best addressed not when we are reacting in anger to recent incidents, but when they are no longer headline news and we have the chance for sober reflection on what has gone wrong. The time is right for us to consider this subject now, when we are not reflecting in anger on the violent conduct of soccer fans such as that which we saw last year.

Hooliganism has plagued football for many years, but it has been hooliganism by a minority. I believe that for the vast majority of fans it has spoiled the enjoyment of the game and of attending football matches. It has created difficulty for residents and businesses in the vicinity of football grounds, as well as—this is the unfortunate trend again at the moment—from time to time on motorways or as people travel to and from matches.

Over time, successive measures have been introduced in Parliament, with varying success. I am glad to have played a role in some of them. On the debit side—I say this particularly to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant)—I have not always accepted the Government or Opposition line. I voted against the Football Spectators Act 1989 on Second Reading, not because I did not agree with the measures that we are seeking to strengthen in the Bill today, but because I thought that the membership scheme was a recipe for disaster. Hopefully, the record shows that those of us who took that view have been proved right.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has just said, and I admire him enormously for it. He will therefore blame no one for the fact that he will get no support from his own Back Benchers today—other than from the Bill's promoter.

Mr. Greenway: I suspect that the silent majority who would support the Bill are elsewhere doing other things, but that remains to be seen.

In 1990-91, the Select Committee on Home Affairs undertook a detailed inquiry into football hooliganism following the 1990 world cup in Italy. Some of the measures that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford is looking to strengthen were introduced following that report in a private Member's Bill which, at the time, was given Government support—particularly measures on racist chanting.

Within the game, it is now generally accepted that violence within grounds has been significantly diminished—the statistics mentioned in the debate support that—but that problems outside grounds still exist. I would say that the measures have contained hooliganism, rather than eliminated it. The work of the police through the NCIS and the national crime squad has played a significant role in ensuring that that success has been achieved.

It has long been recognised that there are several weaknesses within the legislative framework. Equally, the problems that remain are not easily solved. The most important outstanding problem in football is the violent conduct of a few supporters attending international matches abroad. More often than not, that concerns the England team, rather than clubs, whose fans by and large behave themselves impeccably when they go abroad. This

[Mr. Greenway

year, Arsenal, Manchester United and Chelsea have travelled abroad frequently, and I cannot recall much news of trouble. When the England team goes abroad, it always seems that trouble follows not far behind.

Concern has been expressed at the authorities' inability to prevent known hooligans and those who have a clear intent of violent conduct from travelling abroad. The Bill's proposal for international football banning orders seems to be a sensible extension of existing legislation. The Bill seeks to address that major difficulty.

We must consider the wording of clause 1. If we are to impose a duty on a court to make a banning order, we must establish clearly the reasonable grounds on which that duty will be based. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford will recognise that that is a key question for the Committee.

The difficulty of preventing some of those people from travelling to matches often arises because those identified by police intelligence as hellbent on causing trouble have no previous convictions for violent behaviour. If they do, the offences have not been described as football-related on the charge sheet. Often, the offences have not been football-related because the provision of the relevant legislation which prescribed what could be a football-related offence may have been too narrowly drawn.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) rightly referred to statistics that point to about 250 violent offences that were football-related, as opposed to 250,000 assaults—to use his description—generally. The point that he misses is that a number of those assaults would have been classified as football-related had the definition been wider; none of us knows how many, but there will have been quite a few. Because those offences were not designated as football-related, we face the problem that the orders that would have restricted people's ability to travel to matches and to cause trouble somewhere else on another occasion have been limited. That is a key issue that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford is seeking to address in the Bill.

Mr. Maclean: I realise that detailed Home Office research would be required to prove my hon. Friend's point, but I do not think that he is entirely correct. I believe that the NCIS, in its collation of criminal statistics, has taken the widest possible view of football-related offences permitted within the existing definitions, which are fairly extensive. Those 258 offences are contained within the 256,000 other violent offences.

Mr. Greenway: My right hon. Friend answers his own point when he says, "within the existing definitions". The case that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford has made—which, on balance, I support—is that the definition needs to be extended somewhat. That matter can be discussed in Committee.

As I have said, travel to international matches abroad is the major outstanding problem, but there is still difficulty in respect of travel to some domestic matches. Clause 6 attempts to deal with that.

Mr. Maclean: If my hon. Friend is suggesting that the figure of 258 violent offences at football matches is artificially restricted because of the existing definitions, he should bear it in mind that the figure of 250,000 crimes of violence may not be the full picture either, on the basis that a large number of crimes are not reported by the victims. I am merely making a point about proportionality.

Mr. Greenway: That strengthens my argument, not my right hon. Friend's, because the violent yobbery that is still sadly associated with football clubs and may happen on the Friday night before a game or in the early hours of Sunday afterwards does not get reported, but if it were reported it would be right to class it as football-related. The Bill proposes a cut-off point of 24 hours before or after the game. If violence involves people who have been to football matches, there is a good argument for restricting their ability to go to other football matches and cause mayhem on the streets of somebody else's town. That is the central purpose of that part of the Bill.

If we are to have restriction orders, it goes without saying that the courts should impose the restrictions. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) will remember that, when he was chairman of the all-party group on football a few years ago, we often debated the problem of the fact that the courts do not use the powers that they have, and there is still evidence of that.

The idea in clause 3 of imposing a duty on the courts to try to attach conditions such as restriction orders makes sense. We will have to discuss in Committee how that will work in practice, but it is entirely valid for us to attempt to ensure through legislation that restriction orders, be they domestic or international, are imposed more regularly. There has been consultation on that.

There is a problem concerning the Government's proposal in clause 1 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill to have a mandatory referral order for first-time young offenders who plead guilty. My understanding is that that would mean that, if a 17-year-old had been involved in a fight outside a football ground and pleaded guilty, the magistrates would have to impose a referral order if they did not impose a custodial sentence and that, because the offender was under 18—the reason for the referral order—they could not impose a restriction order.

When that Bill is in Committee I shall table an amendment designed to ensure that restriction orders as well as referral orders can be imposed. I suspect that Ministers will agree that that will be a sensible outcome; but that is a problem for that Bill, not this one.

The Bill proposes some changes to the offence of racist chanting. The fact that it is an offence arose from a proposal in a 1991 Home Affairs Committee report. The current law applies when two or more people are involved in the chanting and the Bill proposes that that should be reduced to only one person. I have no problem with that.

Some think that there is something to be said for the enterprise involved in ticket touting, as tickets can be a valuable currency, especially for high-profile matches; but touting can create problems with the segregation of supporters. It was Arsenal football club's experience with those problems that prompted the current legislation.

I agree that it behoves the football authorities to be rather more adept at distributing tickets sensibly. There has been general condemnation of the arrangements made for last year's world cup in France; they were pretty

chaotic. We need to deal with ticket touts in the criminal law, but it is also up to the football authorities to get their ticket sales arrangements absolutely straight.

The original consultation document proposed further restrictions on the sale of alcohol. My understanding is that that has not been welcomed during the consultation, and I am glad about that, because although that is a nice idea, it is far less straightforward than some may think. If a ban were widely drawn it would create serious disruption for local communities, often unnecessarily.

The Opposition's view is that my hon. Friend's Bill proposes some important changes to strengthen the law to combat football hooliganism. It is difficult for anyone to argue against its objectives, and in general I support and welcome them.

However, it is appropriate to add a note of caution. If the solutions that we seek were entirely straightforward, we would have introduced them before. Finding workable answers is not easy. One of the most characteristic features of the Bill is that it simply makes a series of amendments to existing Acts. It does not create any new ideas or offences, but simply extends what is already on the statute book.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kate Hoey): Because that is not working.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Lady anticipates the point that I was about to make.

We have some experience of the existing legislation, and now Parliament is being asked to improve it and get rid of the deficiencies. That is exactly what we are here for, and it is perfectly reasonable to ask us to do it. I hope that that argument answers those who ask why all this was not done in the first place. We are not imposing draconian measures just for the sake of it, but we are thinking about slightly more draconian laws now, in the light of our experience of the problems that I have outlined.

Against that background, we should commend my hon. Friend for the ideas that he has suggested to solve our present difficulties. However, as we reflect with care on those measures, we must keep in mind the fact that there are civil liberties implications, about which I know that some of my right hon. and hon. Friends have strong views.

The surrender of passports should not be introduced lightly—

Mr. Forth: Or at all.

Mr. Greenway: There are circumstances in which the surrender of passports may be appropriate.

Mr. Gale: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Greenway: Before my hon. Friend intervenes, I want to say that I do not believe that what is proposed in the Bill will lead to the wholesale surrender and confiscation of passports. It is my understanding and belief, and certainly my intention, as I support the Bill on behalf of the Opposition, that the power will be used only in extreme cases.

Mr. Gale: My hon. Friend has half addressed the point that I wanted to make. We are talking not about the surrender of passports but about their confiscation, which is a serious issue.

Mr. Greenway: I am not entirely sure that we are talking about the surrender of passports; it is more a matter of handing them in for a few days and getting them back when the match is over.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Greenway: No, because I have explained the point.

Mr. Fabricant: No, you have not.

Mr. Greenway: All right, I will give way.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to me, so that I can explain that there is one hell of a difference between surrender and confiscation. Surrender is when someone voluntarily says, "Here is my navy blue British passport," and hands it in. Confiscation is when the passport is snatched from someone, which is wholly unconstitutional.

Mr. Greenway: I shall not even attempt to answer that intervention because what my hon. Friend says is complete nonsense. We are talking about people being required to surrender their passports for a few days, but such a measure should not be introduced lightly. I do not believe that the courts would do so in any event. The key question is not one of confiscation or surrender; it is of where we strike a balance. That is the issue that the House is asked to confront in my hon. Friend's Bill.

I commented earlier that, in debating this issue today, we are not in what one might term knee-jerk reaction mode, responding to some awful event a few days ago. That is a distinct advantage. We are in a position to make a hard-headed assessment of what more we should do. We must accept that experience tells us that the scenes of violence that we have seen before will be repeated. Sadly, no one will be surprised when they are. Moreover, we can anticipate with certainty that the public will then rightly ask why more was not done by the authorities, by the Government and by Parliament to prevent known hooligans from travelling abroad, or to obstruct the activities of those known by the police to be hellbent on causing trouble in a foreign land, inciting others to violence and to criminal damage.

As I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford, when it comes to civil liberties, we must also consider the liberties and rights of those who will otherwise be the victims of the thuggery and wanton vandalism that some are intent on causing, not just at home but, significantly, abroad as well. Those hooligans have shamed our nation and besmirched our international reputation. Faced with that fact, we must be a little more circumspect about immediately taking the

[Mr. Greenway]

view that civil liberties should override our concerns about those matters. I do not believe that they should. The case for intervention is overwhelming.

We must bear those concerns in mind when we consider the Bill. They will be even more relevant when we consider the proposed amendment that my hon. Friend outlined, which would seek to extend banning orders or restriction orders to some individuals who do not have previous convictions. They may have no previous convictions at all or, more likely, they may have no previous convictions for football-related violent offences. That is an important distinction. Over time, other measures in the Bill, particularly in clause 2, might in part address that problem. I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border that it is a good idea to consider extending the definition of a football-related offence, because more of those people might then be caught.

The question arises—I think that this is the issue that my hon. Friend seeks to address in his amendment—whether the courts should have appropriate powers to restrict individuals' freedom of movement where police intelligence clearly indicates that those targeted are intent on incitement to violence, and whether something more could be done, albeit at the expense of offending our civil liberties sensibilities.

About a year ago, during the Report stage of what became the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North–West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), in response to what happened in France, made proposals for football behaviour orders. The concept behind such orders is clear in the anti-social behaviour orders provided for in the Act. There may be a case, if individuals are known to be likely to cause trouble to others, for establishing a football behaviour order which, like the anti-social behaviour order, would not require a previous conviction.

In the past few days, the Home Secretary has responded to that proposal in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), in which he set out the extent to which the Government have reviewed the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford will be aware of the outcome of those deliberations. That has led him to conclude—at short notice and without being able to consult some of the Bill's sponsors—that it may be possible to include such a proposal in this Bill, which represents the only legislative opportunity for doing something to tackle the problem.

I am grateful to the Home Secretary for recognising in his letter that the Opposition will need time to reflect on the possibility, and for suggesting that the Under-Secretary and I—and our colleagues—discuss how to proceed. We shall certainly do so.

My instincts are that we ought to be able to find a framework that strikes the right balance, although that is by no means a certainty. After Bergkamp's missed penalty, it is clear that nothing is certain in football, so why should we expect certainty in the legislation that we propose to deal with hooliganism?

Mr. Banks: It was a good save.

Mr. Greenway: It certainly was. However, my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) made an important point when he said that other solutions are possible, and I think that he is right.

I say to those of my hon. Friends who have doubts about the Bill that the House has a duty to find a way to deal with the problem. They need to keep it in mind that we are not talking about trying to prevent something that is unlikely to happen. Experience tells us that the problems of violent behaviour with which we are all too familiar will happen again. The police and the football authorities know that, and they know who the perpetrators will be. The 2000 European championship tournament is coming up, and Britain is keen to host the 2006 world cup.

I hope that that world cup competition is held here, but for many years the House used to tell the football authorities to put their house in order. They have done so, and now their encouragement of action by this House is part of their responsible response to the problem. We should support the football authorities in return.

In conclusion, the most frightening aspect of the further trouble that we can anticipate is that the men of violence know that such further trouble will take place. The question for the House is how we stop them. More can and should be done, and the measures in the Bill genuinely seek to achieve that. The House should support it.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kate Hoey): I am grateful for the opportunity to give the Government's response to this private Member's Bill, which the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) presented to the House for Second Reading. I congratulate him not merely on winning the ballot, but on his choice of Bill. Also, like the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones), I pay tribute to the reasoned and articulate way in which he presented what, to some people, is a complicated Bill.

Ten years ago this year, on 27 June 1989, during the passage of the Football Spectators Bill, I made my maiden speech—I share with the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) the way I voted on that Bill. I started off then by expressing my passion, and that of millions of others, for football. I am happy to say that a decade later my enthusiasm has not diminished and I still share it with many millions of people. I also share the hon. Gentleman's distress at Wednesday night's result—the two Front-Bench speakers are both Arsenal supporters.

I am pleased that, as the hon. Member for West Chelmsford indicated, the proposals in the Bill are targeted at the small minority of so-called supporters who cause trouble. I welcome the fact that the overriding aim of the Bill is to look after and protect the interests of the decent, law-abiding supporter. In this era of multi-million pound transfers, massive salaries, huge television deals and worldwide audiences for the sport, we must not forget—and, most importantly, those running football

must not forget—that football supporters remain the greatest asset that the professional game has. It is their interests, safety and security that must remain paramount to all those involved in every aspect of the sport.

With those sentiments in mind, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary launched a public consultation exercise last November to consider measures to deal with football hooliganism. The exercise sought comments on the 29 recommendations contained in the "Review of Football-Related Legislation", which was issued by officials. The report provided a useful platform for discussion and was issued to those involved in football at all levels, the policing authorities and the wider community. It gave an opportunity to influence the direction of Government policy through constructive criticism and support.

Respondents to the exercise—all the responses are in the Library—welcomed the opportunity that the consultation exercise provided. The need for change was recognised by almost every respondent to the public consultation exercise because football, like almost everything else in the past decade, has moved on. Football hooliganism is no different—it has moved on, too. As many hon. Members have said, trouble in and around the ground is almost a thing of the past, save for a few isolated incidents. We have achieved that through a number of successful measures—all-seater stadiums, closed circuit television and more effective policing and stewarding. We should also recognise the effect of legislation that was introduced and supported by all parties in the early 1990s to help combat hooliganism.

However, hooliganism has not gone away and around 4,000 arrests each year are connected with the domestic game of football. I shall put that in context because the Bill has come into being because people have listened to what has been said. As the hon. Member for Ryedale rightly said, it is not a knee-jerk reaction.

Mr. Forth: Does the Minister accept that one must always be cautious when interpreting responses to consultation? The likelihood is that those respondents who tend to agree with what is being proposed and who have a particular interest write in to express their support. However, it is the responsibility of the House to consider the wider interests and views, particularly of those whom I am fond of calling the silent majority.

Kate Hoey: Of course, the results of consultation depend very much on the way in which it is directed at the public. I am sure that it did not have a major effect, but I wrote an article in every Premier and league club programme in the country—and got reactions, too. People who are against legislation are more likely to come forward during consultation. There were some criticisms in the consultation, and the hon. Member for West Chelmsford took account of them. For example, the alcohol ban was not included prescriptively but as a subject for consultation. He examined the results of the consultation and chose not to put that in the Bill. We support that decision.

On the international front, no one wants a repeat of the shameful scenes in Marseilles during France 98. Sadly, those images were beamed around the world and further fuelled the perception that all England supporters are violent thugs with no respect for others or their property. I say again that many thousands of decent, law-abiding supporters follow England, and the Bill is in those law-abiding supporters' interest because their enjoyment is also ruined by the destructive and selfish actions of a small but disproportionately high-profile minority. We must act to protect the interests of law-abiding fans and promote the fact that supporters from this country can be as well behaved at matches played outside England and Wales as at domestic matches. That can be achieved only by partnership between supporters, the football authorities, the police and the Government. We started that process rolling by drawing up our action plan for France 98. We continued it through public consultation and are committed to ensuring an inclusive approach to make football matches safe and secure for those who wish to enjoy football and its unique atmosphere.

I said that hooliganism had not gone away. Those committed to breaking the law and using football as a platform for their activities know that violence or trouble inside grounds is likely to be prevented from happening and that when it occurs, it will be swiftly nipped in the bud. Hooligan behaviour is now more likely to occur some distance from the stadium, often some time before or after a match. The Bill would allow courts to make orders preventing attendance at matches on conviction for football-related offences committed within 24 hours, rather than the one or two hours in current legislation. I am pleased that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford spent some time with police intelligence officers, as I have. I pay tribute to their work across the country.

The measures will help to address the problems faced by the police, prosecutors and courts in obtaining orders against those who commit football-related offences away from grounds. More importantly, the extended relevant period will give courts the power to consider issuing banning orders against those convicted overseas of football-related offences, which often occur days before or after matches in international competition.

The Bill will strengthen existing powers and send a strong preventive message to discourage those who think that they are outside the banning order process. The process is further strengthened by the proposal to allow the courts to place conditions on the issue of a banning order and to require persons subject to an international football banning order to report to named police stations rather than anywhere they choose. Often, when they have reported, they travel overseas and attend the match even though the law has said that they should not. It is essential to stop that happening. The condition of submitting passports in advance of a requirement to report enforces our determination to ensure that such persons uphold the decision of the court. No hon. Member wants court decisions to be flagrantly abused. This is a way to stop that. It has been done before, and I think that it strikes the right balance between the civil liberties of those involved in violence and those of the rest of the country.

There are some 113 restriction orders and almost 450 exclusion orders. Before December 1997, there were nine restriction orders. The figure has substantially increased over the past year, following the Home Secretary's initiative to remind the police, prosecutors and courts of the powers available under existing legislation. However, as has been said, with about 4,000 arrests in England and Wales in all football competitions, the ratio of arrests to banning orders remains low. I have highlighted the difficulties of the court being able to issue orders because

[Kate Hoey]

of the time restrictions. There is a further restriction in that the court is required to be satisfied that to make such an order would help to prevent violence or disorder at a designated match. That is a high threshold for the court to consider. We fully support the proposal, which is set out in the Bill, that it should be replaced by the court being required to have reasonable grounds to believe that it would help to prevent violence or disorder at designated matches played outside England and Wales.

The low ratio of arrests to the issue of orders is also a reflection on the number of convictions that are achieved and, subsequently, the number of applications that are made for the issue of banning orders. As for the latter, the Bill sensibly proposes that the court be required to issue an order in all cases where a person is convicted of a football-related offence and there is sufficient evidence that to do so would help to prevent future violence or disorder at matches.

There is no doubt that the police are aware that certain individuals—a small but important number—are involved either in the planning of or participation in violent or hooligan activity in connection with football matches. Present legislation does not provide—it is not proposed in the Bill, although the hon. Member for West Chelmsford has mentioned that he is considering introducing an amendment in Committee—an ability to deal with known hooligans without conviction for a football-related offence.

As has been said by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, such a measure is not without its difficulties and may have implications in terms of civil liberties and of compromising intelligence sources. There are a number of issues that the Government wish to consider further, and it is clear that we shall have to work with the hon. Gentleman and take advice before we reach conclusions about whether we could support and wish to bring forward a further restriction.

I am pleased that the Bill makes provision for changes to the present law on indecent and racist chanting at football matches. Such offences are particularly nasty and objectionable. Racism of any description should not be tolerated in a civilised society. The Bill is an important step towards achieving that objective.

The actions of a small minority bring particular problems to football. The measures set out in the Bill are necessary to deal with the difficulties and to give a strong message that hooliganism will not be tolerated. We must place the problem in context. It is right, as some hon. Members have said, that more than 26 million people attended football cup and league matches last season in England and Wales, and that there were just over 4,000 arrests. However, the actions of a very small minority grab the headlines and tarnish our international reputation. The perception of violence and hooliganism impacts on how all of us are viewed as football supporters. That is crucial. We cannot have a situation where supporters of Manchester United or Arsenal go abroad to watch a match, as has happened recently, and find that they are all treated as if they are there only to cause trouble and to create violence. We cannot allow that to happen.

In my responsibility for European co-ordination in the Home Office, I am happy to talk to my Italian and French counterparts. However, we must be able to show that we have done everything that we can to ensure that the small minority will not be allowed to travel to matches. Decent supporters want to be treated properly and as human beings. They do not wish it to be thought that all of them are out to create violence.

The Football Supporters Association supports what we are saying about ticket touting. It is keen that action should be taken. We do not want to see again the situation that happened at the last world cup—where thousands of fans were swindled out of their money by agencies being set up that do not have the tickets in the first place. This is not just a Home Office matter, but it is something that the Home Office, the Department of Trade and Industry and my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport should discuss. That does not come within the Bill, but I know that it is something that supporters want us to take up. I shall write to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) on the number of arrests and convictions for ticket touting offences. I understand that there have been about 300.

We are a sporting nation and can be justifiably proud of the high quality of sport that our country attracts; for example, this year, the finals of the cricket world cup and the rugby world cup will be held here. I met the organisers of both tournaments recently, and was pleased with the work that they are doing to ensure the success of their respective competitions. That success will reflect on this nation and on our ability to host successfully major international tournaments.

We should not forget that England is the home of football and that our grounds are now the finest in the world. During Euro 96, we proved that we could organise and host successful, friendly and trouble-free matches where there was a great atmosphere. Football is thriving in England and attracts players from all over the world. At present, it is the place where top stars want to play and that supporters want to visit. It is of course the perfect setting for the world cup—football's greatest tournament. I pay tribute to the work being done by my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport and all those who are uniting around the attempt for a successful bid. However, even if we were not bidding for the world cup, and even if we do not win that bid, the legislation introduced by my hon. Friend, or rather the hon. Member for West Chelmsford—he is not quite my hon. Friend, although we have been talking to each other a great deal recently—is still necessary. The measure is not merely about our attempt to host the world cup—much as we should like it to be held in England—it is necessary because of the increase in travel to competitions in Europe.

We must continue to build on those partnerships that we have already developed between supporters, football authorities, the police and our European partners to make football matches safe and secure environments. I know that many hon. Members want to speak, but I do want to pay tribute to the Football Supporters Association and the work undertaken by its members during the world cup in France. The football embassies that they ran were of great use and support to fans. We want to work with the association to create a proper environment of support for our travelling fans. It is a partnership, and a working relationship with supporters is crucial.

As I mentioned, I have worked closely with the hon. Member for West Chelmsford and have made available to him the results of the public consultation exercise. I genuinely appreciate the level of co-operation that exists

and hope that it will continue. All Members of the House are united in our desire to combat football hooliganism, although there may be differences in the methods by which we want to achieve it. The Bill proposes a range of positive, balanced measures targeted at the football hooligan, but it is also aimed at maintaining and improving the safety and security of the decent law-abiding supporter. Football is enjoyed by millions in this country. The Government fully support the Bill and are aware that it acknowledges the concerns of the police, the football authorities and the supporters.

In my view and that of the Home Office, the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the European convention on human rights. The response of the National Federation of Football Supporters Clubs—an important organisation—stated:

"The proposals are positive and largely acceptable. To those who might argue that such legislation would unduly restrict the civil liberty of miscreants, we would respond that it is time the civil liberty of the well behaved supporter was better protected than it is at present."

Everybody in football must do more—and when I say everybody, I mean the players and the managers. Legislation can be only part of the solution; it cannot solve the whole problem. However, I recommend all hon. Members to give the Bill a Second Reading. I believe that it is a step forward and hope that it will receive a Second Reading.

12.38 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I, too, congratulate my hon. and good Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on winning sixth place in the ballot and on proposing this law and order measure. However, I have some doubts about the passport confiscation measure. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) may be unaware of the difference in meaning between confiscation and surrender, but others of my hon. Friends are not so confused. I have concerns about that matter, but not about others.

To put the whole issue in context, I point out that, terrible though football hooliganism is, it goes back as far as the 14th century. With the indulgence of the House, I shall quote from a proclamation made in 1314 by Edward II. The proclamation declared:

"Forasmuch there is great noise in the city caused by hustling over large balls, from which many evils may arise, which God forbid, we command and forbid on behalf of the King, on pain of imprisonment, such game to be used in the city in the future."

As has been said, more recent events have brought home the need for this legislation. This is the 10th anniversary of the Hillsborough disaster, but before that there was the Ibrox tragedy in 1971 and the Heysel stadium disaster in 1985.

I welcome the Bill as it deals with racist chanting and attempts to exclude troublemakers from football matches. I also welcome the efforts to impose law and order and prevent disorder. However, there remains the question of civil rights, which has been raised by the hon. Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike), for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) and for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), and my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) and many others of my Back-Bench hon. Friends, who all spoke about the confiscation of passports from the unconvicted.

Before I became a Member of Parliament, I had radio station companies as clients, and one of those was Radio Moscow. In the 1980s, I travelled frequently to the Soviet Union—in fact I am convinced that the many Soviet Union stamps in my passport mean that, if there is not a large file on me in the Whips Office, there is certainly one at MI5. A look from the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), tells me that the file in the Whips Office is somewhat larger than the one at MI5. I am conscious that one of the ways of controlling people in the former Soviet Union was through either the non-issue or the confiscation of passports. I am sorry to pick on my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale, who prefers the term "surrender", but I have to point out that that word implies that the action is voluntary.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Can the hon. Gentleman explain how, when soldiers in battle put up their hands and, at gunpoint, walk towards the enemy, that can be considered a voluntary action?

Mr. Fabricant: That is a completely irrelevant intervention, but I shall answer it. They can either volunteer to surrender, or lower their arms and get shot, but the point is that the decision whether to surrender is up to them. If a passport is confiscated, it is not a decision left up to the person from whom it is confiscated—confiscation is compulsion. One is not compelled to surrender, whether it is one's passport or one's person. The hon. Gentleman might be an opera singer, but it is clear that he has never served in the armed forces and does not know what the devil he is talking about.

Mr. Caplin: Can the hon. Gentleman point me to the part of the Bill where the question of confiscation arises? His speech so far has related more to comments made by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) about what changes he might want to introduce in Committee than to the Bill whose Second Reading we are considering today. If I am wrong, I will happily accept any direction to the correct part of the Bill.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is not wrong—in fact, he is quite right. However, on Second Reading we discuss not only the Bill, but those issues that might form part of the Committee stage. The promoter of the Bill has stated that the provisions to which I refer will be tabled in Committee. In an attempt to be helpful, I am inclined to say, although I have slight concerns, that I have no major objections to the Bill as it stands and I shall not vote against Second Reading. However, I would not welcome the amendment that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford described and I do not want the Home Office to take that line, for that would be to cross the rubicon.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but I think that the situation is worse than he suggests. I can reply to the question asked by the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin). Clauses 3(5A) and 3(5B) of the Bill use weasel words. Clause 3(5A) states:

"The court may, if it thinks fit, impose conditions in the order which the person subject to the order shall comply with."

[Mr. Forth]

That sentence ends with a preposition: I wish that legalese were more old-fashioned grammatical. The legislation continues:

"Those conditions may include . . . surrender of the passport".

Although the word "surrender" is used, it is prefaced by the phrase "impose conditions". So those who are hiding behind the word "surrender" are being less than honest.

Mr. Fabricant: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that concern must be addressed in Committee. Many clauses of the Bill have been drafted badly. I am not surprised to learn that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford has received assistance from the Home Office, which is notorious for badly drafted legislation that consistently does not meet the exacting standards that we expect of Departments.

One of the great principles of United Kingdom law is not only habeas corpus but the fact that one is innocent until proven guilty. Only two years ago, one of my constituents was detained for 11 weeks by the French police in Boulogne. He was held without charge and was not allowed to see his relatives or a lawyer. That could not happen in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia or New Zealand where English law reigns supreme. My constituent was finally released without any apology from the French officials and without having been charged with any crime. That is heinous.

I am concerned that, if we are not careful about the wording of this Bill, someone who has not been charged with any crime will have his or her passport confiscated. We must never forget that, despite the European Union and Napoleonic law—which, thank God, we have not had to adopt in this country so far—one is innocent until proven guilty in the United Kingdom. In France—the country nearest to our borders—one is considered guilty until proven innocent. That is a fundamental difference. We must not allow the Bill to encroach on that right, no matter how well meaning this legislation may seem.

We all take for granted the words on the inside cover of our passports—I have a dark blue passport, not one of the little red abortions that are now in general issue—which read:

"Her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State requests and requires in the name of Her Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance and to afford the bearer such assistance and protection as may be necessary."

They are important words because they allow freedom of travel. Returning to my days in the Soviet Union, few people there had external passports—and they were confiscated if people said anything that the state did not like. I suspect that many hon. Members may not be aware that citizens of the Soviet Union also needed internal passports to travel from one oblast—or region—to another.

Mr. Forth: I hope that before my hon. Friend concludes his remarks—which I am finding instructive and fascinating—he will tell us something of his experiences of surveillance in the Soviet Union. The Bill's sponsor, my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), said earlier with pride that he believed that existing surveillance in this country would be sufficient to allow us to finger people who had not been convicted of any offence. I hope that my hon. Friend will reflect on that point in his remarks.

Mr. Fabricant: I shall deal with that matter now. My right hon. Friend is correct to raise that point. I do not like to attack my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale, who referred to photographs of people committing crimes in Marseilles and Toulon. No hon. Member condones loutish behaviour by British citizens at football matches or any other sporting event at home or abroad. However, photos can be, and occasionally are, taken out of context. I gave the example of my friend who, in Toulon, picked up a table to protect himself from rioters. If he had been caught on film and if members of NCIS had seen it, they might have said, "It is time to take away his passport. He has no conviction, but we have a picture of him picking up a table."

I repeat that in this country one is innocent until one is proven guilty. It is all very well for hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale, to say that it is right to require people to surrender their passports for a few days, but a passport gives one freedom of travel, and that is one of our great constitutional rights. No hon. Member should ever forget either the principle that people are innocent until they are proven guilty, or the right to freedom of travel. To confiscate a passport is a great step.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford said in his rational and calm way that there is a precedent for that provision—the treatment of people on bail. However, that is not a precedent for the provision that we are debating because people on bail have been charged with an offence. They have not been proved guilty and the case has not yet gone to court, but they will at least have been arrested and charged with an offence. We are considering the confiscation of the passports of people who have not even been charged with an offence, let alone found guilty.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fabricant: Yes, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make a more sensible point than he did earlier.

Mr. Gardiner: I intervened not to make known my honourable record in the Royal Anglian Regiment, but to challenge the hon. Gentleman on the point about passports. I understand that passports are the property of Her Majesty's Government rather than of the individual. They are, therefore, subject to be withdrawn by Her Majesty's Government at any time for any reason.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman is right. The inside back cover of the passport makes that very point. What is he advocating? Football hooliganism aside, is the hon. Gentleman, who is now giggling, saying that it is absolutely right that if I wanted to go to America to give a talk on—

Mr. Forth: Civil liberties.

Mr. Fabricant: If I wanted to give a talk about civil liberties or about the Labour Government, who are full of good intentions but are unable to fulfil any of them, would it be right for the Under-Secretary of State for

the Home Department, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), to say to me, "I don't like the sound of that. That is the Government's passport and I am confiscating it."? Of course, she would not dream of doing that because it would be unconstitutional and, more to the point, it would be wrong. If the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) is saying that the passport can be freely confiscated by the Government merely because it is their property, I am astonished.

Mr. Maclean: I was astonished to hear the remarks of the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner). Of course, passports are technically the Government's property and can, theoretically, be withdrawn at any time. However, we are all subject to be arrested at any time if we have committed offences, and like the power of arrest, the power to confiscate passports should not be arbitrarily exercised by an officer of the state unless there are exceptionally good reasons.

Mr. Fabricant: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. In an earlier intervention, he referred to the numbers of people who have been convicted of football offences committed at stadiums. I congratulate the police and football clubs for reducing the numbers of people who are convicted of such offences. I put on the record the fact that in 1984-85, there were 40 arrests at football stadiums per 100,000 attendances. Incidentally, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) made a point about the bad grammar of the clauses—how nice it is when hon. Members on both sides of the House say stadia and not stadiums.

The number of offences fell from 40 in 1984-85 to 13 in 1997-98. It is all very well for hon. Members on both sides of the House and my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford to say that, therefore, more offences are now committed outside the stadium, but it is worth noting that even if football offences comprise 0.1 of 1 per cent. of all crimes of violence, and 10 times as many are committed outside the stadium, the overall figure is still only 1 per cent. Although 1 per cent. is still too much and my hon. Friend is therefore right to promote the Bill, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) was also right to make the point that we must put the matter into context. It would be very easy for us to get crime and disorder at football matches out of all proportion.

It is also worth mentioning that the French have introduced emergency security measures to allow suspected trouble-makers to be expelled from France before being convicted of offences, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale said. He said that as there would not be a conviction, passports should be confiscated—

Mr. Greenway: Surrendered.

Mr. Fabricant: Surrendered, to use my hon. Friend's word. I wonder whether—perhaps the Minister will respond to this—the criminal law could be changed so that if British citizens commit a crime beyond British territory and are not convicted in the country in which the crime is committed, they could be arrested, charged and prosecuted in the United Kingdom for the crime. I make that point because it would get round the argument, which has been made from both Front Benches, that passports could be surrendered, or confiscated, even if there is not a conviction—a step far too far.

Clause 1(1) implies that passports should be confiscated. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said, that could be done on reasonable grounds, providing the court is satisfied. I always think that the questions of reasonableness and satisfaction in Bills are too loose and leave too much to the discretion of courts and, far more dangerously, of Ministers. If the Bill goes into Committee, as I suspect it will, that issue must be addressed. We want a fair and constitutional Bill, which does not encroach on the freedom to travel and the rights of individuals, regardless of whether we think that they might be football hooligans. We must preserve the right that one is innocent until proven guilty.

Another problem with the Bill, which has not been mentioned, is that it could be subject to judicial review. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford will address that problem when he winds up the debate.

The question of ticket touting has been debated at some length. I should mention that I am joint chairman of the all-party internet group. If anybody has any grand ideas that we can control the sale of tickets—or anything—on the internet, they should forget it. The internet cannot be policed. We cannot legislate, for example, for the sale of books from Amazon.com or the purchase of half-price compact discs from Tower Records in New York, which, incidentally, possibly evades Customs and Excise duty. Believe me, if Customs and Excise cannot legislate, the Home Office certainly cannot legislate on this matter. Therefore, if any members of the Standing Committee have any idea that the Committee can restrict ticket touting through the internet, they should not waste the Committee's time.

Mr. Forth: Before my hon. Friend leaves that point—which I had hoped to mention if I caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although I fear that time may not now allow it—does he agree that the word "touting" is too loosely used, and has been today? Unless one is prepared to consider the method of sale of tickets; the origin; those who are buying them and for what purpose; and, more important, the various ways in which tickets can be resold outside the ground, through the Royal Mail or on the internet; and then take serious action, it is likely that the spirit of entrepreneurship and enterprise that is sometimes called touting cannot sensibly and properly be tackled.

Mr. Fabricant: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am aware of the arguments of the Bill's promoter, who rightly says that, if ticket touting takes place outside stadiums and people turn up on spec and are disappointed because they cannot buy tickets, that leads to hooliganism. He says that touting should be controlled. I have some sympathy with that argument. On the other hand, I do not want the Bill to remove the rights of the individual to free travel and to the presumption of innocence until proven guilty. I also do not want the Bill to become too much in

[Mr. Fabricant]

control of the freedom of enterprise that the Conservative party—and perhaps of late, half-heartedly, the Labour party—is promoting.

Mr. Burns: How?

Mr. Fabricant: Simply because one could argue that the touting of tickets—that is, the purchase of tickets on a speculative basis and their sale for a higher price—is free enterprise.

Mr. Burns: Why, then, under the previous Government, did my hon. Friend vote for legislation to outlaw ticket touting?

Mr. Fabricant: I did so because, at the time, we were not discussing the withdrawal of passports. Incidentally, the Bill did not work, because ticket touting continues. I shall not venture into this area for too long, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it would be out of order, but many hon. Members voted for the age of homosexual consent to be 16 not only because—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman is already straying too far. During his speech, he has trodden the same ground more than once. I hope that he will not do so again.

Mr. Fabricant: I am reaching my conclusion anyway, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am arguing that any law that cannot be enforced is a bad law per se. The ticket touting law has obviously not been enforced, and it was a bad law. If I voted for it—and I did—I made a mistake, and I admit it. Will my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford admit that he made a mistake if he voted with me?

Mr. Burns: No.

Mr. Fabricant: He will not. All right.

I generally support the good intentions of the Bill, although "good intentions" is often an epitaph, and certainly something that I would not like to see on my tombstone.

I must ask at least five questions of my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford, because a worthless Bill is a waste of the time of the House. First, will the Bill be workable? Secondly, is it right for passports to be confiscated from individuals who have not only not been convicted of any offence, but have not even been charged with any offence? Thirdly, will the Bill be subject to judicial review? Before my hon. Friend says no, I should tell him that the Library considers that it could be.

Fourthly, will the Bill be in breach of European Union directives? Council directive 73/1148, which no one has mentioned, suggests that it probably would be. Fifthly, does the Bill meet all the tests in fairness and decency for which this country is renowned? As the Bill stands, the answer is a resounding no.

1.5 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I regret some of the comments by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant), especially on ticket touting. Does he feel no sympathy for those supporters who support a team all year, but find—when their team gains some measure of success—that their access to tickets is completely denied because of poor ticket distribution and corporate entertainment? I have seen that happen at football matches and—increasingly, recently—at rugby internationals.

Mr. Fabricant: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) pointed out, we should not be controlling the touts, but those who sell the tickets in the first place.

Mr. Edwards: The hon. Gentleman did refer to ticket touting as "free enterprise"—as if it were fair trade.

I congratulate the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on proposing the Bill. I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), and I acknowledge the great deal of work that he has done in the past to support football. However, I did not agree with his criticism of the way in which the Bill has been produced. If it is a good Bill, it can be introduced by anyone in this House. If it is worthy of cross-party support, we should try to get it through this place as soon as possible.

Clearly, there are reservations among Opposition Members about a proposed clause that is not yet in the Bill. In addition, if bans are to be imposed or passports are to be withdrawn from people on suspicion, the human rights implications of that must be considered. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde suggested that if such a ban were imposed, some innocent people might be disadvantaged. Of course, everyone is innocent until convicted, and a serious precedent could be established if that proposal is not looked at carefully.

I have followed football a great deal, although I do not get the opportunity at the moment to go to matches as much as some of my colleagues. In my constituency, there is not a club that anyone could think of which I could go to regularly, where people pay to attend. In my constituency, there is the Abergavenny Thursdays club, which charges admission at the gate. It plays in the Gwent league, having been in the Konica Welsh league—or the comical league of Wales, as some call it—a couple of years ago. The team gets more publicity in the local papers than I do, but I do not see it play as much as I should.

I have been a football supporter at various levels. As a young boy, I supported my local amateur side, Tooting and Mitcham. That is why I was able to intervene on my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on the subject of the Isthmian league. I could spend time talking about some giant-killing matches; most notably against Nottingham Forest in 1958, when I was a young boy. Throughout all levels of football, there is a tremendous latent support. At every level, people are embarrassed by the violence and aggression associated with a small number of people.

I have also followed Manchester United. When I lived in Manchester for six years, I went to home matches. Like many other Manchester United supporters, I see the

occasional game; I go to maybe one or two a year now, at home and away. I have stood on the terraces and felt intimidated, if not particularly frightened, during certain games. I have seen violence at matches and found it distasteful. I would add that the great majority of supporters do not wish to be tarnished with the reputation of being hooligans.

Reference has been made today to the Hillsborough disaster. What a terrible disaster that was; but how awful it was that some newspapers afterwards—I can think of one in particular—castigated some of the victims as if they were thugs, yobs and hooligans. They were totally innocent citizens caught up in a major diaster.

I remember going on a football special train about 10 years ago from Manchester to Liverpool. I had no car at the time, and that was the easiest way to get there. I went after work, wearing a suit, and I recall being abused by police officers on the train when not one person on it had done anything wrong. Those people were castigated as hooligans simply for being associated with Manchester.

At times I have been concerned for police officers who have had to be in the middle of violence at football matches. I have felt great sympathy for them. I have seen violence at matches in the lower levels of the league. On Sunday there will be a local derby between Swansea and Cardiff. Unfortunately, that game has in the past been associated with violence. I sincerely hope that there will not be violence on Sunday and that both clubs will be promoted from the third division by the end of the season.

There has been a rebuilding of football in recent years. Much of the violence associated with football has been greatly diminished. The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) gave statistics on the decline in the number of offences committed at football matches and we all welcome that. We seem to love to believe that violence is perpetually getting worse, but there are certain areas in which that is not the case, and this is clearly one of them.

I want to speak on behalf of the genuine football supporters who have been castigated in various ways. I was at the rugby international at Wembley on Sunday, and I felt that fans were being totally ripped off. A small bottle of beer cost £2.30—more than £5 a pint—which is ridiculous. We need to consider how to improve matters.

The rebuilding of football grounds, the requirement to have all-seater stadiums in the higher divisions, the improved marketing of football and the introduction of closed circuit television have led to increasing attendances, with more women and children at matches. That is very welcome. The reduction in violence will have attracted people and we want them to keep coming to football, so that ordinary people will not find the atmosphere intimidating.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) made an interesting point when he spoke honestly about the prejudice that he had towards football, as a supporter of rugby and cricket. To his credit, he described how his son's enthusiasm for football changed the way in which he thought about it.

Football has reflected many of the social divisions in our society. I went to a school where we played only football. I would have loved to have played rugby. Why could not I have gone to a school where both football and rugby were played? I did not take up rugby until about two years ago—I may be the oldest person to have taken it up—and I still enjoy playing football.

There have been social divisions and snobbery about sport in this country, and that must be part of the context in which we consider the Bill. Wembley stadium is about to be rebuilt. Twickenham is a wonderful stadium and I would love soccer matches to be played there, as they are at Cardiff Arms Park. We heard a lot of nonsense in Wales about how it would be sacrilegious to play soccer at Cardiff Arms Park, but some of the Welsh soccer team's recent successes have been there, and I hope that the team will continue to do well and qualify for the next European tournament. We need to get away from the snobbery that forms some of the social context of football.

Football supporters are not violent, although violent people are attracted to and associate themselves with football. They use the loyalties and rivalries traditionally associated with football at the local, regional and international level as a justification for violence and aggression. Football supporters do not deserve to have their reputation tarnished by the activities of a small minority, and no one should be deterred by violent people from attending football matches.

Those who support our national teams—our whole nation—do not deserve to be embarrassed by the activities of violent supporters overseas. The wealth of resources at the highest level of the game has brought many overseas players into British football. The football-playing community in the Premiership has become truly multicultural but, unfortunately, those who attend football matches do not seem to reflect our multicultural society. If that is the result of offensive racism that is still apparent, it is to be deplored, and I therefore welcome clause 9, which would make racist or indecent chanting by an individual an offence. Racism must be outlawed in all areas of our society, so we should all welcome that clause.

There can be little doubt that the events involving a small minority of supporters in France damaged our national reputation. Those who commit acts of violence associated with football both at home and abroad must be made aware that such behaviour will not be tolerated, and they should not be allowed to attend matches. I therefore welcome the provisions in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 concerning international banning orders, and the provision for six months' imprisonment for breaches of those orders.

We must all welcome the scope for banning for six to 10 years those who are convicted. That shows the Government's commitment to be tough on football violence and tough on the causes of football violence. I also support the clauses that extend banning orders to 24 hours. As the hon. Member for West Chelmsford said, that measure is badly needed, and it is eminently reasonable that it should be introduced.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing time to introduce the Bill, and also those on both sides of the House who support it. The Bill is supported by the organisations most closely connected with football—the police and the Football Trust. It also has the support of British people, and I believe that it deserves the support of the House.

1.16 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): There is only one point that I wish to make, and it is about the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) said that, in Committee, he will introduce a provision

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

whereby people who are as yet unconvicted of hooliganism, but whom the court has reasonable grounds to suspect may be a danger to the public, will have to surrender their passports.

I want to talk about that because of my experience not only as a practising barrister and Member of Parliament but as one of those who sat through the passage of what became the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Two precedents have been adduced in favour of the concept of ordering people as yet unconvicted to surrender their passports. The first relates to bail—a point that has already been adequately dealt with. If one is ordered to surrender one's passport while on bail, one must already have been charged with a criminal offence. I should add that, under the Bail Acts, there is an injunction on courts to grant bail except in the most serious cases.

The point about bail has therefore already been dealt with, but I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford, after a brief absence, has returned to the Chamber, because I am about to talk about my experience during the passage of the Crime and Disorder Act, which set the precedent.

During the passage of the Bill, Conservative Members, perhaps surprisingly, raised many concerns about the civil liberties implications of the anti-social behaviour orders, which the orders that we are talking about today will probably resemble. Labour Members had a bit of fun by asking why I was following the line of Liberty, because they would not have expected somebody with my past to support that organisation. However, if Liberty has a good case, of course I will support it—and I am concerned about civil liberties.

Why are we worried? The problems that the Crime and Disorder Act and the Bill before us are intended to deal with are similar. On some council estates, there are families from hell who make people's lives a problem, and it is difficult to prosecute them, difficult to make a charge stick beyond reasonable doubt, and difficult to get witnesses. The same will be true of football hooliganism, which I must quickly add is a curse on society. None of us wants to stop football hooligans being dealt with expeditiously and properly. That is why I am sure that my hon. Friend was right to introduce the Bill.

We have a problem. How should we deal with football hooligans? The Government came up with a response in the Crime and Disorder Act and are now supporting this Bill, which offers the same response: because those matters cannot be proved in a court of law, another procedure must be introduced. The Bill says that an international banning order can be made if the court

"is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds to believe that making the order would help to prevent violence or disorder at or in connection with designated football matches."

What worries me about that is the level of proof. Our system of justice is clear: if one is to be convicted of an offence, the state brings the case and must prove that one is guilty beyond reasonable doubt. Under the Bill, the authorities must have reasonable grounds for believing that somebody may cause trouble abroad and will have to prove that on the civil balance of proof, not the criminal balance of proof. They will not have to prove those matters beyond reasonable doubt.

When we raised those concerns during our debates on the Crime and Disorder Bill, the response from the then Minister of State at the Home Office, now the Welsh Secretary, was, "I don't know what you're worried about. We had to deal with the tremendous problem of people on council estates and there was no other way in which to do so. We are not talking about a criminal conviction, so why are you so worried? An order will be placed on people; it will result in their having a curfew placed on them, but it is not a criminal conviction. Why, therefore, should matters be proved beyond reasonable doubt? In any case, we are performing a public good."

Various questions need to be asked relating to the civil liberties of the individual concerned. They relate to the burden of proof but also to the fact that, if one disobeys, say, a curfew under the Crime and Disorder Act, or a banning order under this Bill, one will be liable to a criminal conviction. Under the Crime and Disorder Act, that could involve several months in prison. Thus, we could have the extraordinary result that someone ends up in prison having never been convicted of a criminal offence—their only offence would be failing to comply with an order.

Hon. Members will understand, therefore, why I am concerned, on civil liberties grounds, about the surrender of passports for unconvicted people. That may sound a detailed point coming from a lawyer, and people may ask whether we should be worried about it. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford is not trying to replicate what has been done in other countries or what happens in repressive societies, but the fact remains that the mark of a repressive or totalitarian society, or a society not ruled by law, is that the authorities take passports away from people at whim and claim that the individual concerned is a danger to the public. As my hon. Friend reminds us, passports are the property of Her Majesty's Government.

However, passports are never taken away by the Government of this country unless someone is either convicted of a criminal offence or in danger of being so convicted. Under the Bill, someone's passport could be taken away because there are reasonable grounds in the minds of the authorities that that person may cause trouble abroad.

I understand entirely why my hon. Friend is pushing for that, but I urge him earnestly to think the matter through and consider whether it is in the interests of civil liberties. I know that it is an extremely difficult problem. We must balance an individual's natural right to liberty and the danger that he poses to society. I believe that, over the years, we have got that balance about right but, given the provisions of last year's Crime and Disorder Act and the potential provisions of this Bill, that balance may be put out of kilter. That would be dangerous for our traditions.

1.25 pm

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate, as I have been here all morning—unlike the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who I thought should have made some apology to the House for coming into the Chamber late and speaking ahead of other hon. Members.

However, I shall begin by congratulating the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on his selection of the Bill, and on his presentation of its proposals. A few weeks ago, I drove past Chelmsford on my way to Southend to watch my beloved Brighton and

Hove Albion. Afterwards, I wished that I had not watched the match, as my team lost 3:0—one of Southend's rare victories this season—but two things worried me about the game.

I assume that Southend is the closest football league club to the constituency of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford. More than 3,000 Brighton supporters travelled to the match and a small minority, through their actions during the game, brought disrepute on the club and on football. The problems that day were compounded by the fact that, although Southend's stand for visiting fans is all-seater, it retains the old-style fence. The result was that, although the Southend football club authorities wanted fans in that stand to sit down, those people had to stand up because their seats were below the level of the fence. While we should in no way condone the actions of the mindless morons who that day insulted the football club that I support, we must realise that a balance should be struck between the needs of clubs and those of supporters.

I support the Bill, which will help to maintain the great enjoyment that football supporters derive from the game. As has been said, more than 22 million people go to matches each year, and there are relatively few arrests. As I researched my speech, I recalled that, nearly a year ago—on 21 April 1998—I asked a question about the matter. The answer that I received—from the then Minister of State, who is now my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales—stated that 22.8 million people attended matches in 1996-97, excluding cup competition games. The total of only 3,500 arrests was down from the 4,500 of five years earlier, when attendance was only 20 million. Much progress has been made, and I want to pay tribute to all those hon. Members who have contributed to that progress over the years.

When the Bill becomes law, it will give this country one of the best legal frameworks for tackling football-related offences anywhere in the world—an important United Kingdom contribution that will benefit football everywhere. The Bill tightens up some existing laws, and at least begins to recognise that changes are taking place in football, one of the biggest of which is the greater involvement of supporters' groups.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary mentioned the views of the Football Supporters Association and of the National Federation of Football Supporters Clubs. The Centre for Football Research carried out a very good survey at the end of the 1996-97 season. It showed that only 5 per cent. of regular supporters—the people who go to watch clubs outside the premiership, such as Brighton and Hove Albion or Cheltenham Town—thought that trouble was increasing in and around grounds. The survey concluded its final chapter on spectator behaviour by stating:

"These, in short, are not the statistics of a sport still plagued, at the highest level, by hooliganism."

It is important to keep in mind, as we debate this subject, that we are dealing with a small minority of people. We must deal with them effectively, as the Bill does, but we must keep the problem in context. There has been a considerable improvement in the stadiums of England and Wales, in particular as a result of action taken since the Taylor report on that horrific day 10 years ago. I think that we all remember exactly where we were when we saw the pictures at 3.5 pm on that day.

This week, a fellow Brighton and Hove Albion supporter, Paul Hayward—he is not able to reveal it when he is writing as lead writer for *The Daily Telegraph*—said, and I must point out that this is a quote so that the hon. Member for Lichfield does not leap up and have a go at me:

"our stadiums are mostly cathedrals of good policing and common sense. In Italy they still throw coins and bottles on the pitch. If that happened in the Premiership the ground would be closed for three months."

That is an indication of how far football and football supporters have come in England, Wales and Scotland.

For many years, I have been particularly concerned about racist chanting, which the Taylor report mentioned. The report recommended that future legislation should contain provisions to enable an individual to be charged for such an offence. Therefore, I am pleased that the Bill will finally, eight or nine years later, bring into being that recommendation. It would give the police stronger powers to act against racist and indecent chanting of the type that the hon. Member for West Chelmsford described.

Football clubs can do much work and there have been some good examples—Charlton Athletic and Leyton Orient in London spring to mind. However, to give my own club a plug—we do not get that many—in December, when the Home Secretary and my hon. Friends first raised the issue, the programme for one of Brighton and Hove Albion's matches contained a statement signed by all the supporters' representatives, the board of directors, management and players, which I sent to my hon. Friend the Minister. It stated:

"Quite simply, violence, threatening behaviour and racism will not be tolerated by Brighton and Hove Albion . . . Don't allow anyone to drag our well-deserved reputation through the mud."

That is an important contribution that football clubs, supporters, boards of directors and players can make towards ensuring that stadiums and places where we watch football are safe.

I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) has resumed his seat and I am about to say some nice things about the Football Trust, so I am sure that he will be happy. The trust's work has made a great contribution. I was able to say a few words on the matter during the debate on the Budget a few weeks ago when you finally called me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Chancellor allowed the trust more new funding in the Budget, which will be welcome. My call in that debate for the premiership to match that new funding pound for pound has not so far met with great accord among premiership clubs, but I hope that it will do so in time.

The Football Trust has contributed £200 million in the past few years, which is a third of the cost of many projects throughout the country. One area of the trust's work often goes unnoticed—not the main project work, when it contributes to new stands or stadiums, which is important, but the introduction of closed circuit television at football grounds, which makes a big difference to policing and supporter conduct. The introduction of CCTV surveillance equipment has proved to be one of the most important measures in the campaign against hooliganism and has been largely paid for by the trust. It is right that all hon. Members should recognise that fact.

Mr. Fabricant: I could not agree more. The hon. Gentleman is right about the value of CCTV. I am sure

[Mr. Fabricant]

that he would agree that, when someone is clearly seen committing an offence, he or she should be convicted. Does he further agree that it would be good if British law could be changed so that, if CCTV overseas shows people committing an offence and, for whatever reason, they are not convicted overseas, we could indict them for that offence?

Mr. Caplin: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, which he will doubtless pursue in Committee. I shall not be joining him there because, like my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), I am on the Modernisation Committee on Wednesday mornings. My point relates to the Bill as it stands. I think that the hon. Members for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) and for Gainsborough have gone way beyond the Bill; those are matters for the Committee.

I regard CCTV as an important step forward. Total grant aid for it from the Football Trust has been £6.5 million, an important contribution. Beyond that, local police authorities have had the opportunity to ask the trust to finance hand-held cameras to allow them to identify in closer detail potential troublemakers in a crowd. I welcome the way in which the trust has accommodated that.

Clause 10 deals with ticket touting, which several hon. Members have said is entrepreneurship at its best. I do not agree. It is illegal. People who get their hands on 50 tickets should not be able to sell them above face value. That is what touting means. It is not entrepreneurship but robbery to sell something valued at £20 for £50. It is a rip-off. Legislation should deal with it as such.

In general, the Bill should have the support of all hon. Members. It is an important step forward from previous legislation. I hope that it will make speedy progress.

1.37 pm

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): Surprisingly, I rise to speak on the Bill. Given the time, I do not want to go over matters that others have dealt with. I have three quick points. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on his Bill and on the articulate and constructive way in which he introduced it.

On hooliganism, while things have improved, there is a risk—I put it no higher—of complacency and smugness in the football world for reasons that I shall come to later. I support all aspects of the Bill. I will not discuss confiscating passports, but I accept some of the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). I am sure that the Committee will have a lively discussion. In stadiums and in the immediate vicinity of grounds, the problem has been largely, but not wholly, resolved. While the minority seeking trouble is small, those who have had the misfortune to be caught up in such things know the group hysteria that can carry along many more than those who are there deliberately to provoke trouble.

The problem has moved to town centres and lower division grounds. During Euro 96, I remember visiting the odd west end pub, which is an enjoyable activity. Hours after games in London or elsewhere had finished, there were serious football-related incidents involving those who purport to be football supporters. They occurred in the middle of London, not in the vicinity of the grounds. Not least, there was what happened in Trafalgar square in the wake of England's departure from the contest.

I hope that I will be forgiven for being parochial, but my main interest is Wembley. I think that it is agreed that, by and large, there is no longer significant trouble or violence at matches at Wembley. There are not even that many drink-related incidents associated with football grounds. However, four stops along on the Jubilee line from Wembley is Stanmore, which is in my constituency. It is at the end of the Jubilee line. Many coaches, cars and other vehicles that carry football supporters who want to go to games at Wembley stop at Stanmore and take the four stops on the Jubilee line. In some instances the supporters—this does not apply to every game—cause significant disruption, violence and other associated hooligan activities. In Stanmore town centre, which is two or three miles away from Wembley, there are significant football-related levels of violence, and that should be stopped.

I am pleased that the Bill includes provisions on racist chanting. I have the misfortune or otherwise—currently it is not quite a misfortune—to be a West Ham fan. I remember going to Upton Park during the days in the early 1970s when the first black faces—Clyde Best, Ade Coker and others—appeared in what was then the first division. They were taunted mercilessly. Bananas, racist insults and other taunts were thrown at them. That was entirely unacceptable then, and it remains so now.

A point that has not been raised—it is beyond the scope of the Bill but it is important none the less—is the culture of football and of the coverage of football, which is very important. We should say as a House that the notion that Paul Gascoigne can get away with pretending to play an Orange flute at an old firm game or that Robbie Fowler can sniff the lines on a football pitch to provoke Everton fans in some way is as reprehensible as some of the activity that takes place beyond and around grounds. The players, as well as others, have a serious responsibility in regard to law and order and the prevention of hooliganism at football games.

To echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin), ticket touts are charlatans. They are criminals. The notion that they are cheeky chappies who have the best welfare of football fans at heart but might make a few bob on the side is nonsensical. They should be chased down, not least because of the disciplinary consequences inside a ground when any number of organisations try to get into segregated parts of the stadium. The touts drive a coach and horses through that arrangement in the interests of chasing money.

Football remains a very beautiful game. It excites emotions—it certainly does at West Ham now and then, although perhaps not all the time. There are responsibilities on the House in establishing a legal framework, on those in authority within the game and outside and on the 22 men at any given time at any stadium, who are the real ambassadors of the game.

I wish the Bill fair speed in Committee. I hope that those who serve on the Committee—not me—have an enjoyable time and discuss the Bill thoroughly so that, when it returns to the House for Report and Third Reading, it is strengthened and invigorates the legislation that is already on the statute book, which has been introduced by the present and previous Governments, to ensure that all those who go to football matches can do so without fear for their security or, in some cases, their life. I commend the Bill to the House.

1.45 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on being successful in the ballot and bringing forward a large private Member's Bill. However, I must tell him that I have a number of deep concerns about the measure. First, it is a highly complex Bill, and I think that it is beyond our ability to deal with it adequately under the private Members' Bills procedure.

Unlike my hon. Friend, I have no criticism of Home Office draftsmen or women; I suppose I may have had a few years of biased indoctrination. However, part of the problem in the Home Office is that it has to deal with so many different aspects of our life and draft legislation to square the circle.

Like the legislation that was proposed to deal with stalking, this Bill is extremely complex. The stalking Bill tried to mix civil and criminal law; this Bill is complicated because it would amend a large number of pieces of legislation. In the departmental hierarchy for the production of the worst Bills, the Department of the Environment used to be much higher up the league table than the Home Office, but part of the problem in this case is the complexity of the Bill. I consider it to be a main Government programme Bill that we should deal with properly in Government time, rather than using the private Members' procedure.

In respect of action taken over the years to tackle football hooliganism, I am pleased that my hon. Friend mentioned that the previous Government were not idle. A range of actions were taken to tackle the problem, including a great deal of legislation and the establishment of the football intelligence unit within the National Criminal Intelligence Service. I pay tribute to the NCIS for the excellent work that its members have done on that matter and on other aspects of criminal intelligence gathering. That is vital in dealing with serious criminals. The NCIS has also been successful in its actions against football hooliganism. However, that is quite different from saying that in future people should lose their passports purely on intelligence provided by the NCIS. I shall return to that point if I have time.

I want to consider briefly the existing legislation. Given that legislation, is the Bill necessary? Has that legislation worked? The Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol Etc.) Act 1985 prohibits the sale of alcohol on the way to matches on football special coaches and trains, and makes it an offence to be drunk on them. It makes it an offence to try to enter a ground when drunk, or in possession of alcohol; to possess or consume alcohol within view of the pitch during the period of a match; or to be drunk during the period of a match. It gives the police powers to arrest and search anyone reasonably suspected of committing an offence under the Act; they can also search coaches and trains.

The Public Order Act 1986 created a new offence of disorderly conduct: behaviour that stops short of actual violence but which is likely to cause distress, to harass or to alarm. The Act gives the courts the power to make exclusion orders against convicted football hooligans, prohibiting their attendance at league matches in England and Wales.

The Football Spectators Act 1989 gives the courts the power to impose restriction orders on those convicted of football-related offences to prevent them from travelling abroad to matches involving teams from England and Wales. Those subject to such orders must report to a police station. The Act also gives magistrates in England and Wales powers to make orders against those convicted of corresponding offences in certain other countries.

The Football (Offences) Act 1991 created three new offences of disorderly behaviour: throwing missiles; taking part in indecent or racist chanting; and going on to the pitch without authority. Those offences attract a fine, and exclusion and restriction orders may also be imposed.

Not content with that, we introduced the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. That enacted legislation, on grounds of public order and public safety, to make it an offence for an unauthorised person to sell a ticket for a designated football match—the touting offences.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 is the final piece of legislation that I shall cite. That Act increased the maximum period of imprisonment for breach of a restriction order from one month to six months, and the maximum fine to £5,000. It made failure to comply with a reporting requirement an arrestable offence.

Mr. Leigh: While the Crime and Disorder Bill was in Committee, Conservative Members proposed a football banning order, but the proposal was resisted by the Government.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend may be correct. In the past, many proposals and pieces of legislation were resisted by the Labour Opposition that have now been slightly more enthusiastically embraced.

Mr. Forth: Will my right hon. Friend be dealing with the issue of maximums and minimums in legislation? I should understand why, if he does not, but I ask the question because I should prefer the courts to use discretion on those matters. The Bill seems to take us further away from that approach towards the introduction of statutory minimums. Does my right hon. Friend have a view on that matter?

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend is right—I do have a view and, if I have time later, I shall deal with that point.

I have given the House a brief overview of the large amount of legislation relating to football hooliganism that has been introduced in an attempt to make an impact on the problem. The questions to be asked are, has it worked and do we need this new Bill? To answer the question of whether it has worked, one need only look at the statistics produced by the NCIS itself, which show that the number of arrests in football grounds has fallen 37 per cent. between 1992-93 and 1997-98—in other words, during five years in which the existing legislation has been biting. The number of arrests outside grounds has fallen by 17 per cent.; the total fall in arrests is 28 per cent.. That has happened not because the police service has become more idle or is not arresting people, but because the problem has been tackled and substantial progress has been made.

[Mr. Maclean]

I have collected from the internet all the recent NCIS press releases. The press release of 6 August 1998 is headed, "Fall in domestic hooligan arrest figures continues" although concern is expressed about the violent hardcore that remains. The press release states:

"Football arrest rates at domestic league matches in England and Wales dropped significantly during the 1997/98 season."

The rate is now down to 13.4 people per 100,000 spectators, which is welcome. The statistics help to put into context the overall level of criminality relating to football. Of the 3,307 arrests in 1997-98—slightly fewer than the year before—more than 1,000 were drink related. The only arrests for violent offences that I can find are: affray, 65; violent disorder, 52; throwing missiles, 31; and assault, 110—a total of 258 arrests.

I agree with every hon. Member who says that 258 crimes of violence are 258 too many. Although I am concerned about some of the arguments that Liberty has advanced in respect of the Bill, I have never been regarded as a great civil libertarian and I am quite happy, not merely to take away the passports of the 258 people convicted of crimes of violence, but to take away their freedom and their liberty and to put them inside one of Her Majesty's prisons for a considerable period. However, although I am concerned about the 258 people arrested and convicted last year for committing some crime of violence in connection with football, I am delighted to see that the latest Home Office statistics show a continuation of the trend that commenced under the previous Government and the stewardship of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) and me, whereby there is a substantial drop in overall crime, even though the number of crimes against the person always edges up every year.

Of crimes against the person last year, there were 256,100 notifiable offences, 34,000 sexual offences, many of which were extremely and nastily violent, and 62,000 offences of robbery. Overall, there were 352,900 crimes of violence last year, whereas crimes of violence connected with football numbered 258. My point is simply that, although the House might be enthusiastic about additional measures to deal with the evil of football hooliganism, it is talking about 258 crimes. I have to ask whether the draconian measures in the Bill are proportionate to the problem, and whether we should not be taking other powers, or extending existing powers, to tackle the 32,000 reported rapes—and we all know that the actual number of rapes is greater than the reported number—or the 350,000 crimes of violence all told. I am concerned that we may be focusing on one problem and taking our eyes off the ball when it comes to crimes of violence in society. I am concerned that some parts of the Bill may go too far in dealing with a problem which, although nasty, is just a tiny part of the general violence in society that we must address.

Time is pressing, so I can touch on only a few of the many concerns that I have about the Bill that have been identified by the organisation Liberty. I shall advance my arguments in Committee—if I am unfortunate enough to serve on the Committee—or at some other time and seek answers from my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford and from the Minister.

I am concerned about clause 1, which imposes a duty on the court to make an international football banning order where it has reasonable grounds to believe that would help prevent violence or disorder. What constitutes "reasonable grounds"? Does that represent a diminution in the normal criminal standards of proof? Liberty thinks it does—and I found in the past that Liberty was often correct. *[Interruption.]* This Government also ignore Liberty. I have fewer concerns about the drafting of this Bill than about the drafting of the Immigration and Asylum Bill, which is in Committee—but we will not mention that.

I am also concerned about clause 2. What safeguards will there be to ensure that the police and the courts do not take disproportionate action? What criteria will be used to determine whether an offence committed away from the ground is football related? I am concerned that youngsters of 14 could be caught up in unruly behaviour that may be classified as a football-related incident. Those kids would then be branded and stigmatised for 10 years, which is how long the banning order could apply. Those youngsters who were not real football hooligans would have those football-related offences hanging around their necks for longer than they deserved. I do not care what the law does to real football hooligans. I hope that they are punished severely—it serves them right. However, innocent people could be caught by the legislation.

How feasible will it be in practice to prosecute an individual on those grounds? What will be the burden of proof? Is there too much risk that such prosecutions will be overly dependent on police intelligence that might compromise other intelligence? I am concerned about the conditions and duty to report in clause 3. What guidance will be given as to what is "reasonably practicable"? What redress will be offered when a passport is unduly retained?

I heard what the Minister said about the advice that she has received about the European convention on human rights. She can do no better than consult lawyers about that issue. I hope, for her sake and for that of the Government, that the advice proves to be correct. It would be a unique occurrence if lawyers' opinions were found to be correct on every occasion. I am concerned about what advice the Minister will receive about my hon. Friend's suggestion regarding confiscating the passports of unconvicted people. We do not have time to go into that today, and I do not think the Minister has received advice about that issue. However, we shall want to return to that subject later as I think it has serious ECHR consequences.

Clause 4 deals with the duration and termination of orders. I shall put several questions about that to my hon. Friend on another occasion. I am concerned also about clause 6, "Domestic football banning orders"; and about clause 10 and ticket touting. My concerns are similar to those expressed by my hon. Friends. As to strengthening the rules on ticket touting, we voted to make ticket touting an offence not because we thought it was disgusting, unfair and commercially inappropriate but because touting broke the segregation rules, which we believed were essential in stopping violence. I hope to return to that subject later.

I return to the issue of whether the Bill is justified and absolutely necessary. As a Minister during the Euro 96 competition, I can confirm that the NCIS and the police conducted superb operations, although I take no credit for

that. I had the privilege of visiting the Metropolitan police control room and seeing all the European intelligence officers working fantastic, off-the-shelf Microsoft computer equipment, which was a first for the police service. The NCIS issued a statement saying that the cup matches were perfectly policed and that there were no major problems.

We now have a Bill that seems to have come about because of the shambles of the world cup in France. That shambles occurred not because our legislation is faulty but because the French authorities ran a shambolic ticketing operation that was directly responsible for causing problems and encouraging many more of our hooligans and touts to go to France. I should like to deal with that point at a later stage; perhaps it will arise in Committee.

I end by saying that I will not today oppose the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford, but I have many concerns that I hope he will address in Committee. If not, we may have to deal with them when the Bill returns to the Floor of the House.

2.1 pm

Mr. Burns: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall speak briefly to the Bill. We have had an extremely interesting and helpful debate and I am grateful for the support that my Bill has attracted from hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones).

I have listened with great care to the concerns expressed by a number of hon. Members. I respect those concerns and if the Bill is granted a Second Reading, I will be able, along with other hon. Members, to consider those issues in more detail in Committee. I urge the House to give this badly needed Bill a Second Reading so that it may continue its progress through the House and, if necessary, be improved during that process.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Licensing (Young Persons) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.2 pm

Ms Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is a great privilege to be able to introduce a private Member's Bill, and I am grateful for the opportunity to present this Bill because the measures that it contains are urgently needed. I regret the lack of time available to debate the issues fully, but I hope that hon. Members will want to support the Bill's objectives and will allow it to proceed to a Committee stage, where it can be debated more fully, as is right and appropriate.

The Bill will create new barriers to children gaining access to alcohol. It has the backing of the Portman Group, which represents the alcohol industry, and it makes a number of proposals, including closing a legal loophole that allows courts to distinguish between the liability of licensees and that of their employees by providing that anyone who makes a sale to a minor would be liable to prosecution. It would create a new offence of proxy purchase when someone over 18 purchases alcohol for a minor, which is already an offence in Scotland. It would give police and trading standards officers powers to undertake test purchasing where retailers are suspected of making unlawful sales.

I first became aware of the legal loophole through the death of David Knowles, a 14-year-old from Pudsey, who was sold lager and alcopops and was killed as he ran across a dual carriageway. David died in the Easter holidays in 1997. He had been football training with his friends when one of them suggested that he go to the off-licence and buy alcohol. He bought lager and alcopops, returning for more lager shortly afterwards. On the way home, he ran down an embankment and on to a dual carriageway. David crossed two lanes before being struck by a car, and was killed.

David was a bright boy—in the top six at school for maths. His ambition was to be a bank manager. He could have been anybody's son. His father, John Knowles, described David has a serious young man who acted completely out of character. He said that David might have got away with looking 15 in a bad light, but that he was obviously under age.

Even though the police seized video footage which proved that David was served twice in the same off-licence, prosecution of the staff collapsed because the licence holder did not directly employ them. That has exposed a gap in the law, which allows people who sell alcohol to young people under the age of 18 to escape prosecution when, as is increasingly common in bigger chains, they are employed by the parent company and not the licensee. Thousands of staff in off-licences and supermarkets can sell alcohol to children without fear of prosecution because of that glaring legal loophole.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): Is not the crux of that element of my hon. Friend's Bill the fact that tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of staff can sell alcohol to children of any age—including perhaps even my son of six years old—with complete immunity from prosecution? Does she agree that the loophole is not simply wide but growing by the week?

Ms McCafferty: Indeed, my hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The more supermarkets that stock alcohol and the

[Ms McCafferty]

more that ordinary folk like my hon. Friend and I use them to purchase alcohol, the more likely we are to be served, like David, by staff who are not directly employed by the licensee. As my hon. Friend clearly pointed out, it could happen to anyone's child. David's parents were distraught when they realised that no one could be brought to justice for selling their son the alcohol that led directly to his death. My Bill will close that loophole by providing that anyone who makes a sale to a minor is liable to prosecution.

To tackle the problem of young people who have reached the age of 18 buying alcohol legitimately, and then passing it on to friends or acquaintances under the age of 18, the Bill will introduce a new offence to make it unlawful for someone to buy alcohol in shops and off-licences on behalf of a young person. That will also penalise passing adults who are prevailed on to make purchases for young people.

In Scottish law, an equivalent provision has been part of licensing legislation since 1976. The proposed provision for England and Wales is intended to target adults who, whether known to a child or a stranger, will agree, often outside or close to licensed premises, to buy alcohol to be passed on immediately to a child in the street.

A survey carried out by Professor Howard Parker at Manchester university in 1996 found that, of a representative sample of 13 to 16-year-olds in Greater Manchester, 53 per cent. obtained alcohol by asking older friends to buy it for them, and 26 per cent. by asking strangers to buy it for them. Among the 26 per cent. of children who asked strangers, there was a prevalence of girls and of 13 to 14-year-olds. The dangers inherent in such vulnerable young people approaching strangers for favours must be immediately obvious to hon. Members.

Many supermarkets and off-licence chains keep logbooks of refusals of service, with reasons for such refusals. Evidence presented to the task force on under-age alcohol misuse by the British Retail Consortium revealed that there were about 4.5 million refusals to serve alcohol to under-age customers in supermarket chains in 1992. In a recent survey of 100 off-licences by the police in Salford, rigorous compliance with the law by licensees was found to be the norm, and a willingness to serve under-18s the exception. It is the minority of licensees who bring the reputation of the majority into disrepute whom the Bill will target.

The schools health education unit found in 1997 that 19 per cent. of 14-year-olds, 10 per cent. of 13-year-olds and 6 per cent. of 12 to 13-year-olds all claimed to have purchased alcohol during the previous week. A more recent survey by the Health Education Authority found that, by the age of 11, more than three quarters of those questioned had already tried alcohol, and that that proportion increased to 95 per cent. by the age of 15. More than 20 per cent. of the youngsters surveyed said that they had been "really drunk" at least once. The Health Education Authority estimates that about 190,000 11 to 15-year-olds drink the equivalent of seven pints a week.

There have been many calls for the greater use of test purchase operations, to ensure that retailers comply with the law. Such operations obviously have a useful and legitimate role to play in tackling abuse by cynical licensees. They already uphold the laws preventing the sale to minors of a range of inappropriate substances, such as tobacco, videos, fireworks and lottery tickets. Some agencies have expressed uncertainty about the current legality of test purchase in respect of alcohol, which differs from other products because it can be an offence to buy it when under age as well as for retailers to sell it. In the case of other products, only the retailer is committing an offence.

To put matters beyond doubt, I propose to amend the law to make it explicit that test purchases may be applied to the sale of alcohol in England and Wales, and to exempt young persons involved in supervised test purchasing from prosecution. In the case of other age-restricted products, test purchasing has proved to be a convincing and effective deterrent against under-age sales. In his evidence to the task force, Peter Mawdsley, head of trading standards for the city of Liverpool, said:

"Test purchasing in Liverpool has significantly reduced the rate of illegal sales of tobacco, fireworks, videos and lottery tickets."

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way; I am conscious that I may not be able to speak in this important debate. In the absence of national identity cards, what proof can a retailer get from a young person that that person is over 18?

Ms McCafferty: The right hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I accept that it is extremely difficult to prove the age of a young person who is determined to purchase alcohol—or any other product that it is illegal for a minor to purchase—and it is correct that the Government do not have a national ID scheme. However, I suggest that the new photo-ID driving licence will ultimately be carried by every young person, and there is the Portman Group's "prove it" card, which is available to anyone. In my constituency, nearly 3,000 of those cards have been issued, and every month 5,000 to 10,000 are issued nationally. Should my Bill become law, retailers may be more cautious, and more anxious to identify the age of consumers who wish to purchase their goods.

Peter Mawdsley, giving his evidence, has said that, remarkably, no shop in Liverpool has ever re-offended. I believe that all hon. Members would like that success to apply to alcohol sales, too.

As the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) remarked, it is difficult for reputable traders to establish the age of people who want to buy alcohol, especially when they are determined to do so, but the law that makes it illegal to serve alcohol to under-18s already exists. The prohibited sale of alcoholic drinks to under-18s is not a new law, and the legalisation of test purchase will act only as an aid to enforcing the existing law; it imposes no additional legal restrictions on retailers. I believe that the introduction of test purchase will give greater impetus to one or more of the identity schemes that are coming into existence, and that retailers will be much more likely routinely to ask for proof of age.

The vast majority of those who make and sell alcoholic drinks in the United Kingdom welcome the Bill. The call for test purchasing and for an offence of proxy purchase has been supported repeatedly by the trade and industry-related organisations.

The work of the Portman Group—whose member companies are the nine leading drinks manufacturers in the UK—is generally supported throughout the industry.

and the licensed trade as a whole. The group recently submitted a paper in response to the Department of Health's consultation on alcohol strategy, in which the group called for all the legislative changes offered by the Bill. The group made the point that the measures would complement the progress that the industry itself is making towards tackling alcohol misuse.

There is a great deal of evidence that illegal alcohol sales to minors leads to unsupervised drinking and alcohol abuse, reaching down to primary school level. I am extremely concerned, as are many health professionals, about the potential adverse health effects on physically immature children, who are often drinking beyond levels recommended for adults. In my view, this demonstrates a serious social problem, and there is understandable and well-justified public concern. I have had many complaints from all over my constituency about the problems caused by a minority of youngsters who are getting into trouble due to drink.

Recently, the Health Education Authority commented that because drinking was such a central part of our social life, many parents did not realise, or underestimated, the harm it can do. While parents are understandably worried about illegal drugs, it is important to realise the range of problems that alcohol can cause to children. The main problem is that it is too easy for children to get alcohol, and urgent action is needed.

The Bill will give the police, trading standards authorities and the courts real powers to stamp out the problem and, especially, to tackle the minority of irresponsible retailers and adults who either deliberately flout the law or turn a blind eye to under-age sales. Together, the measures represent a great improvement in the range of measures to tackle under-age alcohol abuse.

I pay tribute to the liquor and retail industries for their readiness to address the social problems arising from the products that they sell, and their support for the Bill. There must be no let-up in the fight against under-age problem drinking and the misery that it causes. I commend the Bill to the House.

2.17 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Not for the first time this week, Parliament is discussing the age of majority. The difference between what happened in terms of the issue debated in the other place and what will happen in terms of the age issue in this Bill will be striking to many.

We congratulate the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Ms McCafferty) on her success in promoting the Bill. All hon. Members know that under-age drinking is a problem which must be tackled across a range of areas. The Opposition are generally persuaded that there is merit in endeavouring to close the loopholes in existing legislation, as the Bill seeks to do.

I am struck by the fact that many of the briefing notes relating to the Bill praise the efforts of my local trading standards authority, and the police, in North Yorkshire in tackling this problem. Their approach is cited as a model for others to follow. From personal knowledge, I would agree.

In particular, the authorities in North Yorkshire believe that they have addressed successfully some of the problems relating to test purchasing. There is concern about whether it is right to exploit those under 18 and, equally, whether it is right to incite licensees to break the law. My understanding is that, in North Yorkshire, licensees are told in advance when an area is to be targeted so that they know only too well that they could fall into a trap.

I have some anxieties about the staff of licensees, some of whom may be young, and the need to ensure that any messages about the provisions are passed on to them, so that 19 or 20-year-old youngsters working behind a bar at the weekend to supplement their student grant—if they are lucky enough to have one—who sell drink to 17-year-olds do not suddenly find themselves in court. We ought to be able to iron out such anxieties during the further stages of the Bill, if it makes any progress.

I address my next remarks to the Minister. I and many of my hon. Friends have serious anxieties. If we are intent on strengthening the existing legislation, we must do more to ensure that people are able to know whether the young people to whom they sell alcohol are of the right age. That affects not only pubs but, more especially, off-licences.

I have taken the test—I am sure that other hon. Members have, too—in which one is asked to look at photographs and decide who is 18 and who is not. Interestingly, I got most of the boys right but most of the girls wrong. That shows how difficult it is for people at the cash desk of an off-licence or a small supermarket to identify who is 18. More must be done on identity.

Increasingly, in my experience, under-age drinking involves not only alcohol bought in pubs or off-licences. Vast quantities of alcohol that has been illegally imported in the cross-channel traffic are consumed. There have been several instances of that in my constituency. When the source of the alcohol is traced, it turns out to have come off the back of a van. It would be pointless to crack down on the professional trade and allow the smuggling to go unchecked.

Let me enter the caveat that, if the Bill makes further progress, the Government should do more about the problems of identification and smuggling.

2.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Ms McCafferty) on her success in the ballot and warmly commend her choice of Bill, as well as the manner in which she introduced it. I share her concern about the unlawful sale of alcohol to young people and gladly support the Bill's intentions. I hope that it is supported widely and receives its Second Reading.

My hon. Friend described the Bill's provisions well. I will comment later on the points made by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), but I want first to concentrate on the right hon. Members for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) and for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border served with some distinction at the Home Office for four years. He well knows that the concerns that the Bill addresses—about the link between early alcohol abuse and crime and disorder—as well as issues concerning the

[Mr. George Howarth]

safety of young people, have been around for some time. As I understand it, he has no objection to the specific measures in the Bill.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): How do you know?

Mr. Howarth: Because I spoke to him about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We cannot have conversations across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Howarth: If the right hon. Gentleman will refrain from sedentary interventions, I will refrain from responding to them.

The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border objects not to the Bill but to the procedures that may be involved in implementing it.

Mr. Maclean: The Minister mentioned me and, as he is trying to be fair to me, I should make it clear that I have no concern about large parts of the Bill, the bulk of which deals with the sale of alcohol to under-age people. It is the test purchasing that worries me, and I deeply regret the fact that those provisions are in the Bill, without any of the safeguards that I consider essential. If they were not in the Bill, I could happily support it.

Mr. Howarth: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman has given us that clarification, because the point could easily be debated in Committee—although I accept that it may be a matter of principle.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst served as an Education Minister in the previous Government for about two years.

Mr. Forth: Five.

Mr. Howarth: I have no wish to underestimate the right hon. Gentleman's contribution. I recall one Friday when, across these Dispatch Boxes, we debated the issue of drugs, which are a matter of concern for many of us, and were of particular concern to him at that time, because he was an Education Minister. I know that, especially given his previous responsibilities, he has been, and still is, concerned about substance abuse, and I presume that that would cover alcohol and the effect that it can have on young people's lives, on families and on criminal behaviour.

I therefore appeal to both right hon. Gentlemen not to use the procedures of the House to stop the Bill making progress today. They both know that, if it does not receive a Second Reading today, it will almost certainly fail. My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley movingly described the events that took place in Pudsey, and similar events could easily happen again elsewhere, possibly costing lives. My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) has tried before to deal with those problems, but unfortunately he was defeated by procedure. I therefore hope that the right hon. Members for Penrith and The Border and for Bromley and Chislehurst will accept that any concerns that they may have can be dealt with in Committee.

The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) talked about proof of age and about illegally imported alcohol. The Government are prepared to consider identity cards. The matter is under consideration, but we have not reached a final conclusion. In the meantime, there are proof-of-age cards. My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley mentioned the Portman Group card; there is also the Citizencard. At the moment we rely on those, and the Bill will give fresh impetus to both those schemes, which we welcome.

Illegally imported alcohol is indeed a serious problem, and my colleagues at the Treasury are aware of it, not least because of the loss of revenue involved. We intend in due course to introduce measures to deal it. We also recognise that it is a contributory factor to the problems that the Bill attempts to address.

I hope that those matters will be taken into consideration. I also hope that the House will agree that any reservations that right hon. and hon. Members may have can be dealt with in Committee, and that the Bill deserves a Second Reading.

2.28 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I hope that the Minister is not suggesting that, however virtuous a Bill may appear to him or to many other people, it should have a right to go through the procedures of the House without proper debate and deliberation.

Mr. Howarth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman seemed to be coming perilously close to saying that. I hope that he has given some thought to why, if the Government think that the measure is so valuable, they have not thought fit to introduce it in their own time.

On Fridays reserved for private Members' Bills, it is a source of puzzlement to some of us that we often have to deal with measures that appear to have originated from Government, or to be fulfilling some of the Government's pledges or programme, which the Government seem to expect to go through the private Members' Bills procedure without proper debate or deliberation. I hope that the Minister was not suggesting that.

Mr. Howarth: No.

Mr. Forth: I am sure that he would not. However, for the sake of clarity, we must realise that, when a debate of the importance that the Minister attributes to this one starts after 2 pm on a Friday, when we all know that our time expires at 2.30, and when only the promoter of the Bill and two Front Benchers—no Back Benchers—have had time to speak, it is asking far too much of the House of Commons to say that the measure should be nodded through without further debate, following the Minister's contention that it can all somehow be cleaned up in Committee.

As it happens, I have a large number of questions to ask about the entrapment part of this Bill—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 7 May.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

MILITARY ACTIONS AGAINST IRAQ (PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL) BILL

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Queen's consent has not been signified. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Friday 23 July.

On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, concerning Queen's consent. Is there not an issue for Parliament here? When a matter involves the House of Commons and its debates, and whether there should be parliamentary approval for military action—in this case in Iraq, but the same would apply to Kosovo—is it right that there should have to be Queen's consent? My objection is not against the Palace; it is a point of principle as to whether it should be for the House of Commons alone to make up its mind on what can and cannot be debated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The reason why Queen's consent has not been obtained is not a matter for the Chair. As the House knows, and as "Erskine May" on page 605 makes plain, without Queen's consent, I cannot propose the question on the Second Reading.

FUEL SAFETY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 30 April.

BUS FUEL DUTY (EXEMPTIONS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [12 March], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 23 April.

AGE LIMITS ON HEALTH CARE BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 May.

MOTOR ACCIDENT INJURY COMPENSATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 May.

SEA FISHERIES (SHELLFISH) (AMENDMENT) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 23 July.

PUBLIC HOUSE NAMES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 23 April.

SEXUAL OFFENCES (ANONYMITY OF DEFENDANTS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 23 July.

DEREGULATION COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Gordon Marsden and Mr. Ivan Lewis be discharged from the Deregulation Committee and Mr. Brian White and Dr Ashok Kumar be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Hill.*]

SELECT COMMITTEE ON MODERNISATION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ordered,

That Dr Phyllis Starkey be discharged from the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons and Lorna Fitzsimons be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Hill.*]

PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Paul Stinchcombe be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Mr. Nigel Griffiths be added to the Committee.—[*Mr. Hill.*]

Cervical Cancer

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

2.33 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South–West Hertfordshire): First, I wish to thank the Minister for being here to respond to this Adjournment debate. We all know how precious Fridays are to Members of Parliament for visits to their constituencies. They are all the more so to a busy Minister, to whom I say a double thank you.

My interest in this issue initially came from my membership of the Public Accounts Committee, on which I have served for some 10 years. It reported on the effectiveness, or perhaps lack of effectiveness, of the cervical cancer screening programme. The report criticised the programme, which has been the subject of widespread comment. My parallel concern is that, unless there is improvement in the poor levels of accuracy being achieved, confidence among women will inevitably be eroded. That, to my mind, would be a great shame, because the screening programme has been well organised and its coverage of 85 per cent. of eligible women is unprecedented. As it stands, it saves lives. Let us make no bones about that. However, I hope that what I am proposing might save even more.

Each year, the programme costs £130 million, and an average 4.4 million smear tests are taken. The programme is a jewel in the Department of Health's public health policy crown. However, it could be much better. Over the past two years, the Government have attempted to solve many screening problems produced by the laboratory results and to achieve screening coverage targets. To reinforce that attempt, they created the cervical screening action team.

The National Audit Office report highlights the fact that cervical cancer is the most common cancer among women under 35. The United Kingdom continues to suffer some of the highest incidence rates in the developed world. Around 3,500 women are developing invasive cervical cancer, and about 1,300 dying every year.

I shall not go into the detail of the current test, which was developed 40 years ago. The pap test screens for abnormal cell changes. A sample is taken, scraped on to a slide and examined through a microscope. It seems hardly surprising that screening large numbers of tests each year by the human eye alone leads to missed detection of abnormal cells. The results achieved are, under the circumstances, magnificent, but they are not good enough for today.

A recent study by the United States agency, Health Care Policy and Research, reported that the pap test was only 51 per cent. accurate in detecting abnormalities. Other reports suggest greater accuracy levels, but it is an inescapable fact that detection rates vary between 50 and 70 per cent. For every 10 women undergoing a test, between three and five will have abnormalities that may be missed. Some 50 per cent. of women who develop invasive cervical cancer have clear test histories.

I shall not labour my point about the sensitivity of the current test. The Department of Health is only too well aware of its shortcomings. On 25 March, the chief executive of the national health service litigation authority was quoted as saying that a judgment against the Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust had put the whole screening programme at risk, demanding a level of accuracy that the present techniques cannot deliver.

I was disappointed to read in the press at the weekend that plans to introduce computerisation of the smear test programme had been abandoned by the NHS. That is not the health service's fault, but, under the proposed PAPNET system, accuracy levels could have risen to 90 per cent. or more. It was hoped that the system could be introduced nationwide, but those hopes have been dashed by the collapse of the American company making the computerised system.

That system would have enhanced 40-year-old technology, and I hope today to persuade the Minister that all is not lost. We have an opportunity to use an alternative test in conjunction with the existing screening programme, which would increase detection rates for cervical abnormalities to around 97 per cent., a considerable jump from 50 per cent. I am referring to the hybrid capture 11 DNA/HPV test that has recently been approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration as having a 99 per cent. negative predictive value. Despite the clumsy title, the test effectively eliminates false negative results. I rely on expert advice when I say that that is highly significant. If a woman is HPV—human papilloma virus—negative, the chances of her being predisposed to the cancer are negligible. Using a combination of the pap test and the HPV test would raise the detection rate to about 97 per cent., as I said.

The Minister will be only too well aware that about 200,000 of the women who are screened every year show borderline abnormalities and 1,000 women are referred to colposcopy—I hope that the Minister will be able to tell me how to pronounce that word accurately—clinics for examination at a cost to the public of about £35 million. Out of the 200,000, only 4,000 were diagnosed as having invasive cervical cancer in 1996-97. We should not underestimate the worry, concern and stress that every one of those 200,000 women felt, especially as 196,000 of them, on current figures, went through unnecessary worry, and the time and cost implications of the health chain involved: the general practitioners, clinicians, screeners, pathologists and all the other staff who take part in the process.

My submission is simple: the HPV test should, at the very least, be urgently piloted in a number of United Kingdom regions. I would not be doing my job as a Member of Parliament if I did not tell the Minister that I hope that she will agree to that and that if she started such a pilot study in hospitals near my constituency I would be more than delighted—I can give her the names of the hospitals afterwards so that she can immediately get the programme under way.

The Government's position on HPV testing has remained static. The Minister will be aware of a parliamentary question that I tabled a few weeks ago on the trials taking place in the NHS. In her answer, she referred to the TOMBOLA study being conducted by the Medical Research Council. I am not in a position to judge the progress of that study, but I have been given to understand that it was commissioned quite a few years ago, but has never really got under way. If that is the case, progress in examining the causes of and surveying the disease have probably rendered the study past its sell-by date.

A paper by Professor Jack Cuzick, head of epidemiology at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, has demonstrated that a screening programme using HPV testing could save about £30 million per year, as medical studies show that such testing could safely extend the screening interval from three to five years. The longer interval would also be a tremendous bonus for women and would mean an enormous saving in time and pressure on the medical services.

A little bird has told me—I am not at liberty to go into greater detail—that a further endorsement of the testing process will be forthcoming from the United States in the next few weeks. The Minister is aware that the NHS health technology assessment programme is conducting several studies on primary and secondary research and the roles of HPV testing. I am told that the results will be published shortly. In turn, I sincerely hope and, in fact, expect the programme to endorse the use of HPV testing in borderline cases. It will be interesting to find out its recommendations on the use of such testing on so-called borderline smears.

I am reluctant to discuss finance and cost because I am not qualified to do so with accuracy. I do not have the resources to cite the benefits with authority, but this month a conference of the British Society of Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology held in Sunderland estimated that a policy change to age-restricted cervical screening with a HPV test at 50 would substantially reduce costs. If so, that must generate some enthusiasm for change among the hard-hearted Treasury people who hold some of the purse strings. Various financial models have been run to try to show that the screening would help. They have shown results ranging from savings to maintaining the financial status quo. As the Minister and I know, the only real test of whether it would save money would be a monitored pilot scheme.

I express my appreciation to all the people who have come together to give me the facts and figures to enable me to raise this important issue. They include a professor, a manufacturer, a medical researcher, a woman's health care worker, a specialist journalist and, most importantly, the women taking part in the screening programme. I can safely say that no one has told me, "No, you are on the wrong track. I would not go ahead if I were you." Everyone has said that the test must be introduced by our national health service as soon as possible.

I started by expressing appreciation of the size and coverage of the present screening programme, but technology has moved on. It is time that changes were made to embrace the future. I realise that what I am suggesting will, in the fullness of time, be superseded by better methods, but we cannot afford the luxury of waiting. If the improvements available today are not introduced quickly, the number of medical legal actions descending on the NHS and hospital trusts will mount as night follows day. On Tuesday I heard about the possible consequences of screening failures at Peterborough district hospital.

I make my plea to the Minister to agree to the piloting of the use of HPV testing in the national health screening programme on behalf of the women subjected to unnecessary doubt and worry, the women who undergo unnecessary further examination and, perhaps even more importantly, to the women who sadly die unnecessarily every year because of the shortcomings of the testing system.

2.48 pm

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): I congratulate the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) on securing this debate. I listened carefully to his speech and I think that nothing divides us. I hope that he will take from everything that I say our shared sense of urgency about moving ahead to underpin the screening programme with the quality assurance that is essential and seizing the opportunities of new technology when it is established to the tests of proof that we require: that it is effective and can be disseminated as standard practice.

Having said that, let me recap on the scale of the programme. As the hon. Gentleman said, some 4 million women are screened every year in England. Our experts estimate that the programme prevents about 3,900 cases of cervical cancer each year.

The death rate from cervical cancer has fallen steadily since the programme began in 1988, and mercifully it continues to fall. The number of deaths from cervical cancer in England and Wales has dropped from 1,369 in 1994 to 1,222 in 1997. I think that we should be proud of what has been achieved so far. However, we should be under no illusion—despite the overall success there have been some failures. I shall set out some examples of the price of failure, especially in terms of the confidence of women, to which the hon. Gentleman rightly referred.

Following the failures in Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS trust and elsewhere, we believe that as a Government we have taken swift and wide-ranging action to address shortcomings in the cervical screening programme. Since December 1997, the programme has undergone the biggest shake-up in its 10-year history.

I shall run through the steps that we have taken to address the weaknesses that were identified. First, regional directors of public health were required to carry out detailed regional reviews of the cervical screening programmes and draw up action plans to deal with areas of weakness. From this year they will be making formal annual reports to the NHS executive of the performance of the programme in their region, thereby underpinning accountability.

Secondly, improvements have been made in the way in which the programme is managed. Responsibility, particularly for commissioning quality assurance for the cervical screening programme, has been transferred to the regional office and all regions have now appointed a quality assurance director. Let me not for one moment underestimate the extent to which we inherited fragmentation, confused lines of accountability and an absence of any systematic quality assurance, which clearly had a bearing on the poor performance of the screening programme in some areas.

[Ms Tessa Jowell]

The third improvement that we have made is that laboratories that read smear tests are required to apply for accreditation. They were required to apply by June 1998, and all have now done so. This is important because laboratories that read fewer than 15,000 smear tests have been reviewed, and the majority have now stopped reading smears or have merged with other laboratories. That is important because of all the evidence that suggests that it is necessary to have a critical mass of experience to ensure maximum reliability in reading smears.

The fourth improvement is that where refresher training has been provided for staff in laboratories, a resource pack for the training of smear takers has also been published. We hope that that will also help to reduce the number of inadequate smears. The NHS cervical screening programme has also provided pump-priming money and expertise for a training course to support the implementation of the training pack. Training and retraining must be a continual aspect of the service.

Finally, work is under way to build better relationships between laboratories and smear takers to ensure that adequate feedback and training systems are in place. Under the new stringent quality assurance arrangements, regional quality assurance teams will be able to identify both those laboratories that report high rates of inadequate smears and individual GP practices which take a high number of such smears, and will work with them to improve their performance in smear taking.

In December 1997, a cervical screening action team was set up to oversee the review process on implementation of the identified action plan. In its report, which was published in August 1998, the team noted the progress made but expressed particular concern about the lack of public confidence in the screening programme. I am extremely concerned about that.

The failure of public confidence is the price that we pay for publicised failures. Whatever the number of women involved, that leads to widespread failure in confidence in the programme. We must always be vigilant about that, but the major task ahead of us is to rebuild confidence among women about the effectiveness of the screening programme. In order to do that, we must be more open and explicit with women about both the benefits and the limitations of cervical screening. We completely understand that when women get a result they want a guarantee that it is correct. However, even with perfect management and 100 per cent. coverage, no screening programme can ever be 100 per cent. accurate. Screening is like wearing a seatbelt; it reduces risk, but does not remove it. We must ensure women throughout the country understand that that is the basis for the terms on which they use the service.

A common, but understandable, misconception is that cervical screening is a test for cancer. It is not. It is a test for abnormalities which, if left undetected and untreated, might lead to cancer. Cervical cancer is a very slow-developing disease. By having smear tests every three to five years, women can reduce their risk of developing cancer by between 80 per cent. and 90 per cent.—a major gain. That is why it is so important for women to have regular smear tests. However, women should always report any abnormal bleeding to their doctors.

Beyond the improvements that have already been set in train, we acknowledge that other aspects of the programme need improvement. Regional offices are to improve colposcopy services, building on the action plans drawn up earlier this year.

In order for the screening programme to be successful, it is important to screen as many women as possible—as the PAC report pointed out. We are worried about the range in the level of uptake, especially because those areas where the uptake is lower tend to be poor, deprived areas where general health is also poor. We do not accept the inevitability of that. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made a requirement that all health authorities should achieve 80 per cent. coverage by March 2002. The 13 health authorities that are not currently doing so provided action plans at the end of February setting out the measures they intended to take to achieve that. My right hon. Friend met the chairs of those authorities in March and made it clear—in no uncertain terms—that he expects the chief executives to be held accountable for their health authority's performance on that matter.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire referred to new developments. We are determined to ensure that the service provided is the best possible and takes advantage of all the new and available technologies. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the current pap test has been in use for about the past 40 years. Although it is not ideal, expert advice is that it is currently the safest and most effective way of screening women for cervical abnormalities. Its estimated failure rate is between 5 per cent. and 15 per cent. New methods of taking smears, such as liquid-based cytology, are currently being piloted in Scotland and we await the results with interest. We are determined that the technology of smear-taking remains at the leading edge. There are also developments in new ways of reading smear tests, such as the semi-automated screening systems.

A great deal of research is under way. Although, unfortunately, Neuro Medical Systems Ltd., the potential PAPNET provider, went into liquidation, other systems are being tested and we shall examine closely their potential benefit to the screening programme. Before any new technology is introduced, it must be safe and effective and meet the high standards that will be required by our newly established National Institute for Clinical Excellence or be approved by the national screening committee.

In respect of new technology, we proceed on the basis of the best available expert advice, and human papilloma virus testing is an example of our adoption of that approach. There is a substantial body of evidence about the relationship between 13 of the 70 HPVs and cervical cancer. It appears to establish a causal link, but the exact nature of the mechanism is not known and it is not yet possible to determine which women with HPV will go on to develop cervical abnormalities and which will not.

Less evidence is available as to the significance of HPV testing: for example, it is possible that HPV testing will help in identifying the vast majority of women who are at low risk of developing cervical cancer. Women with a consistent history of negative smear test results over a period of 15 to 20 years and no evidence of HPV may be suitable for less frequent screening, thereby reshaping screening programme protocols.

Another possibility of HPV testing is that it might help to reduce the number of smears and unnecessary intervention in women with low-grade abnormalities of the cervix. Negative HPV status might mean that it is unnecessary to follow the current practice of repeat smears, which should also improve specificity and cost-effectiveness and reduce anxiety. We are closely considering HPV testing and we shall be guided by evidence of its effectiveness.

For the Government, there are four key objectives: maximising the number of women who are screened; ensuring quality and reliability; promoting and pursuing the implementation of new technologies; and contributing to our cancer target of reducing the incidence of preventable death by 20 per cent. overall by ensuring that every life that can be saved by screening is saved.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 19 April 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HFC BANK BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Pensions

1. **Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Beckenham): What estimate he has made of the proportion of the working population who have provided only for the basic state pension and have incomes between £9,000 and £20,000. [79728]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): All employees who earn above the lower earnings limit automatically accrue pension rights above the basic state pension level, through the state earnings-related pension scheme or a contracted-out equivalent. So all employees in the earnings range mentioned will have made some provision above the basic state pension.

Second pension provision is not compulsory for the self-employed. About half the self-employed are making secondary provisions and some of the rest may have accrued rights from earlier employment.

Mrs. Lait: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that reply, but it implies that he is not prepared to set a target for the sale of stakeholder pensions. Given the derision with which individual savings accounts were greeted on their introduction because of their complexity, does he agree that the prime purpose of introducing a new pension system—including stakeholder pensions—is to reduce complexity and not add to it, which is what stakeholder pensions have done?

Mr. Darling: I answered the question that the hon. Lady asked, but she is now asking a different one. The Government believe that some 4 million to 5 million people will benefit from stakeholder pensions. The difficulty is that if an individual is not eligible to join an occupational scheme, which is usually the best possible option, the only alternative is a personal private pension. That is not appropriate for someone on low earnings or, arguably, for many on moderate earnings. It is to those people who do not have adequate cover that the stakeholder pension is geared. The consultation period having now ended, the structure of our pension reforms, and the introduction of the stakeholder pension in particular, have been almost universally welcomed.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Some 65,000 pensioners are newly eligible for the minimum income guarantee, but they must have an income of less than £75 and capital of less than £8,000. Is the Secretary of State satisfied that the Government are doing enough through the pilot projects in hand to ensure that those who are now newly eligible for the minimum income guarantee will get it?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point. We want to ensure that all pensioners who are entitled to support get it, and that is one of the reasons why we have run pilot projects to encourage take-up, such as the telephone take-up campaign, which has proved very successful. We want to ensure that those who are eligible for the minimum income guarantee of £75 a week for a single pensioner and £116.60 for a couple get that help. I readily accept the hon. Gentleman's point about the capital and income limits, which is why we said that we wanted to consider that issue—which can cause problems—when we published the Green Paper in December. For the sake of completeness, I should add that all pensioner households will get the five fold increase in the winter fuel payment this winter of £100, which will be paid before Christmas.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): It speaks volumes that not a single Labour Member wishes to take part in the major question about pensions on the Order Paper today. Is not it unbelievable and nauseating that this Government, who affect concern for pensioners, and poorer pensioners in particular, find a way to force poor pensioners to pay tax on their savings income, even if their total income is below the income tax threshold? Not content with that, the Government have also found a way to prevent pensioners with savings income from benefiting from the 10p rate.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that my hon. Friends support the Government's actions on pensions and are only too happy on this occasion to leave the field clear for Conservative Members to ask their questions. That is what Question Time is all about. I repeat the point, which I made a few moments ago to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), that the structure of the pension reforms that we have introduced, including the minimum income guarantee for the poorest pensioners, has been widely welcomed. We are spending some £2 billion more on the poorest pensioners—money that was not there under the Conservative Government—through the minimum income guarantee and the increase in the winter fuel payment, which will greatly help many of them. The 10p starting rate of tax will affect all taxpayers, which will be widely welcomed by pensioners and others. The Government are happy to be judged on what they are doing for today's pensioners and for ensuring that, in the long term, pensions are at long last based on a sound and stable footing.

Social Security Policy

2. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip–Northwood): When he last met the Commission of the European Union to discuss social security policy in the European Union. [79729]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I met Director-General Larsson on 1 March 1999.

Mr. Wilkinson: Did the Secretary of State and the Minister discuss with Mr. Larsson the potential effect of a withholding tax on savings incomes of European Union nationals in other countries on the profitability of financial institutions, which has already been hit by the Government's changes to advance corporation tax? Should not Ministers have impressed on Mr. Larsson the importance of supporting privately funded pension schemes, especially as many of the countries in euroland have an unfunded liability for pensions of more than 100 per cent. of gross domestic product?

Angela Eagle: Mr. Larsson is aware of the United Kingdom opinion on the withholding tax, but it is clearly for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, via ECOFIN, to present the main arguments on the issue. However, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the bulk of the meeting with Mr. Larsson was spent in discussion on employment, employability and equal opportunities in the European Union.

Means-Tested Benefits

3. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): What percentage of amounts paid out by his Department are subject to means testing. [79730]

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): In 1997-98, 34 per cent. of social security expenditure went on means-tested benefits. In 1979, the figure was 16 per cent.

Mr. Viggers: Is the Minister aware that, in a recent debate, I pointed out that the combination of the means-tested guaranteed minimum pension, housing benefit and council tax benefit meant that people had to save a staggering £80,000 to be better off than those who had done nothing at all to save for their retirement provision? The Minister has not previously replied to that point, but will he comment on that figure? Will he confirm that what the Government now propose is the greatest ever extension to means testing and the greatest ever disincentive to saving for one's retirement?

Mr. Timms: The figure that the hon. Gentleman quotes is inaccurate. It is important that people get the full benefit of their work and savings when they retire. That is why we have designed the state second pension as we have.

I do not agree that the minimum income guarantee, which took effect last week, should rise in line with prices only—the implication of what the hon. Gentleman said. Although that would lead to there being fewer people on means-tested benefits, it would also mean lower incomes for 2 million low-income pensioners, of whom there are 1,500 in Gosport. If that is Conservative party policy, I hope that one of the hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench will seek an opportunity to explain it. The Government's policy is that even the least well-off pensioners should be able to share in the benefits of rising national prosperity.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): The Conservatives do not have a leg to stand on when it comes to means testing, but the left wing of the Labour party has two solid legs. Will the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill and various other proposals before the House at present extend means testing? Some Labour Members would be very disappointed by a move in that direction.

Mr. Timms: I have said that the state second pension has been designed to avoid means testing. People should be able to look forward in retirement to an income that is above the means-tested threshold. The state second pension has been designed so that all people who work and contribute throughout their lives will have, on retirement, a retirement income above the minimum income guarantee level.

Furthermore, carers—people who have been out of work as a result of caring responsibilities—and the long-term disabled with broken work records are for the first time being credited into the state second pension. As a result, they, too, will have an income in retirement above the minimum income guarantee level. I hope that my hon. Friend will warmly welcome those proposals.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Minister has failed to answer a point raised, strangely, by hon. Members from both sides of the House. The Government say that they want to raise pensioners' incomes and to break dependency, but the minimum income guarantee, which is linked to the means test, will drive more and more otherwise independent people down into dependency.

Independent figures show that one person in five is dependent on income support at present, and that the number will rise to one in three by the early part of the new century. Is not that a travesty and a defeat for a Government who say that they are going to break dependency, but who in fact will make more people dependent and raise the cost of welfare?

Mr. Timms: The figure would be one in three if we continued with the policies that we inherited from the Conservative Government. That is where we are heading, and that is why we made our proposals for reform. The state second pension will reduce the proportion of pensioners who are in receipt of means-tested benefits. The hon. Gentleman should explain to the House and to all those pensioners on income support why his party apparently wants to increase the minimum income guarantee only in line with prices. What does he have against people on income support? The Government's view is that even the least well-off pensioners—those on income support—should be able to share in the benefits of rising national prosperity.

Disabled People (Benefits)

4. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South–West): What assessment he has made of the effect of benefits payable to disabled people on their ability to find employment. [79731]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): Removing barriers to work is a key strand of our strategy for helping disabled people. Since last October, we have protected disabled people's benefit position for one year after starting a job and allowed unlimited voluntary work. Last week, we launched the incapacity-to-work pilots: a package of four measures that will improve opportunities for disabled people who want to move into or return to work.

Dr. Starkey: Does my hon. Friend accept that a significant number of disabled people have been unemployed for so long that they have lost the confidence that they will be able to sustain employment if they find it, and are not fully aware of the new benefits? What is being done to ensure that local Benefits Agency offices work closely with local Employment Service offices to ensure that disabled people are guided through the transition from out-of-work benefits to in-work benefits?

Mr. Bayley: My hon. Friend makes some extremely important points. We have changed the linking rule, extending it from eight weeks to 52 weeks, precisely to give people who have been out of work and on benefits for a long time the confidence that they can try work without putting the security of their benefits at risk, should they need to return to them. It is extremely important for the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency to work closely together to explain to people in that position that they have everything to gain from trying employment and that if it does not work out, they will not have lost their benefits. That is precisely what the single work-focused gateway is intended to do and what the new deal for disabled people pilots are doing already.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Whatever the Minister says, does not he realise that the changes in incapacity benefit will drive many disabled people out of work? Disabled people with progressive conditions who are able to be in full-time work for some years, but then reach the point at which they can work only part-time could be deprived of the right to claim incapacity benefit when, eventually, they are unable to work at all.

For many disabled people, the policy will be an incentive to leave work. Does the Minister accept that, on top of the introduction of the means-testing of incapacity benefit, which reduces the incentive to save, the policy will drive more disabled people into dependency?

Mr. Bayley: No, I do not accept that point for one minute. It is a misleading misinterpretation of the Government's intentions. The hon. Lady ignores the fact that the incapacity-to-work pilots launched last week provide four new measures to assist disabled people to take work, including the job match payment of £50 a week to enable disabled people to try part-time work, and the job start payment of £200 to enable people going into a job after a gap to meet the initial costs. Those are benefits for disabled people that will make it easier for them to move off incapacity benefit and into work.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South–East): I want to raise again the way in which people with mental illness are treated by the Benefits Agency. On Friday, I came across the case of a woman who has been suffering from agoraphobia for a long time. Last week, she lost her benefit and she now has to live on £29 a month. She was expected to attend an interview tomorrow with respect to going to work. This morning, I have discovered, through examining her medical record with the practice concerned, that the medical evidence has not been considered with any seriousness, which has been very disturbing for her. Will my hon. Friend ensure that all Benefits Agency offices treat people with mental illnesses with much more sympathy than they appear to do at present?

Mr. Bayley: If my hon. Friend writes to me with details of the case, I shall investigate and write back to him. We can visit benefit claimants in their homes where it is unreasonable or inappropriate to invite them to come out for a medical. That may be the answer in this case.

Fraud

5. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): If he will make a statement on the level of fraud within the social security system. [79732]

12. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): What targets he has set for reducing fraud in the benefits system. [79739]

17. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will report progress in tackling fraud in the social security system. [79745]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Government published their strategy for combating fraud and reducing error on 23 March. Copies of the document, "Safeguarding Social Security", are available in the Vote Office. Our object is to get claims right from the start and to keep them right thereafter. The National Audit Office has welcomed this new approach.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. What action is he is taking following the Audit Commission report that showed evidence of housing benefit fraud by officers and locally elected councillors in 25 per cent. of local authorities that it visited?

Mr. Darling: The Government are taking several steps, both with regard to specific incidents reported to us and generally. The hon. Gentleman may know that we have announced additional funding to ensure that claims are properly verified and that proper checks are put in place in offices to prevent fraud or error. We have also arranged for all local authorities that want it to have remote access to local Benefits Agency offices to cross-check material held there. I firmly believe that if we get the systems right, and take a little more time to ensure that the information is correctly processed and the correct procedures

followed, that will cut fraud and error and provide a disincentive to those who might be tempted to try to defraud the system.

Siobhain McDonagh: Does the Secretary of State agree that it is important to ensure that benefits are correctly applied in the first place and to look for fraud afterwards? As someone who has worked in a Department of Social Security office and in housing benefits, I am well aware of how the system can make fraud possible. Is he sure that we have changed procedures enough to ensure that the level of fraud and poorly processed claims is reduced from that under the previous Government?

Mr. Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend. The previous Government's practice was to instruct Benefits Agency staff to process claims as quickly as possible. The result was that when we came into office, we found that two out of five decisions were wrong. That meant that we had to spend much time chasing round and picking up the pieces. We have cut that rate, with the result that in this Parliament alone, we shall save £1 billion by ensuring that we get claims right in the first place. It is such savings that have allowed us to channel money away from fraud and error into doing far more for pensioners and families, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the number of arrests made by the Benefits Agency fraud investigation service fell dramatically in February after a month where it was half the average of preceding months? If so, how does he square that with assurances that he and one of his Ministers gave as recently as 11 January? The Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), said:

"Far from watering down the campaign to combat that fraud, we are gearing it up".—[*Official Report*, 11 January 1999; Vol. 323, c. 16.]

Is not the opposite the truth?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. The Government's record on prosecuting people is very good. He referred to a particular month in which, for various operational reasons, there was a slight downturn in activity, but that followed a month in which there were a record number of arrests. That shows that the Government take the detection of fraud and the prosecution of those who commit it very seriously. What is new is that for the first time, the Government are determined to ensure that all members of our staff not only prevent fraud and error in the first place but, if it is discovered that things are wrong, take the necessary action through the benefit fraud inspectorate or our special investigation services to ensure that people are detected and brought to justice. The nonsense that the hon. Gentleman talks can only encourage those who attempt to commit fraud.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am sure that my right hon. Friend welcomes the initiatives taken by local authorities such as Birmingham, whereby remote access terminals, allowing housing benefit entitlement to be checked by the local authorities, are used. Does he not think that there should also be a system that would alert local authorities when people have come off certain benefits and no longer have housing benefit entitlement? At present, the system seems too proactive; we could cut down on benefit fraud by alerting local authorities when certain entitlements have ceased.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right. Far more needs to be done to ensure that staff in local authorities—through the housing benefit offices—and Benefit Agency officers can speak to each other, so that they know what they are doing and share information. We are piloting certain gateways to improve the system; I also believe that the new IT equipment with which the Department will be provided during the next two to three years will make a big difference. Frankly, one of the problems is that we inherited a system in which there had been almost no investment in IT, modern technology and techniques. We are determined to tackle that; if the DSS and the Benefits Agency have up-to-date technology and proper working procedures, much more money can be saved—money that would, for example, be better spent on supporting families and pensioners.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): The House will not be surprised that the Secretary of State seems to blame everyone but himself for the failure in dealing with fraud. Under his leadership, the Department's record has been less than impressive, with a considerable deterioration from the position left by the Conservatives. Does he agree that the one thing that he could do would be to encourage greater transparency? With reference to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), the report does not name the councils in which fraud was taking place. Will the Secretary of State now name and shame those councils? Will he have the Audit Commission's terms of reference changed so that future reports give us a complete perspective on what is happening?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman refers to a report prepared by the National Audit Office, not one provided by the Government. It is for its officials to decide what is in the report; they are perfectly capable of making specific criticisms in it. I firmly believe that local authorities that fall below an acceptable standard should be exposed, and the Government will ensure that local authorities are given every possible encouragement to drive up their standards. That is the whole purpose of the best value reforms that we are introducing.

As for the Government's record on fraud, I repeat the point that I made earlier in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh); when we came into office, two out of five claims were wrong and, as a result of the action that we have taken, £1 billion has now been saved. That £1 billion is being spent on pensioners and families; it would not have been available under the previous Government.

New Deal for the Disabled

6. **Ms Christine Russell** (City of Chester): What training his Department plans to give to personal advisers working for the new deal for the disabled. [79733]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): The new deal for disabled people is a joint initiative between the Department of Social Security and the Department for Education and Employment. The Benefits Agency is providing training to help advisers give accurate advice about benefit issues and to provide "better off" calculations for clients who are thinking of taking up work. That supports the wider range of training that is being provided by the Employment Service and the Department for Education and Employment, which are responsible for delivering the service.

Ms Russell: Is my hon. Friend aware of the level of expertise that exists already in the voluntary sector? Those with such expertise have already done good work in helping to break down attitudinal barriers to work and to create better access to the workplace. What plans does my hon. Friend have to harness the good work done by the voluntary sector to help in the new deal for getting disabled people back to the workplace?

Mr. Bayley: My hon. Friend raises an important point, with which I have a great deal of sympathy, having worked in the voluntary sector myself. The voluntary sector has made a huge contribution to the Government's welfare reform proposals through its membership of the disability benefits forum, and has provided advice on the training programme specifically for personal advisers. My hon. Friend will be interested to learn that the Department has just agreed the secondment of a director of one of those voluntary bodies to provide advice in this area.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I understand that, in future, people with disabilities, if they want to claim benefit, will have to attend a work-focused interview with a personal adviser. Will the Minister explain the subsequent procedures relating to entitlement—one goes for the interview, but what happens then? I suspect that we shall all have people coming to our constituency surgeries asking for advice, so it would be helpful if the Minister explained the processes relating to this and other benefits in respect of which people will have to attend a work-related interview.

Mr. Bayley: The point of the single work-focused gateway is to provide a common point of access to the benefits system, whereby members of the public will receive advice on both benefit entitlement and the assistance that the Government can give to help people into work. Benefit claims will be processed in the normal way, which varies from one benefit to another. The idea is to provide a service that is better, clearer and easier for the public to use.

Habitual Residence Test

8. **Ms Oona King** (Bethnal Green and Bow): If he will make a statement on the operation of the habitual residence test following the Swaddling judgment. [79735]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): The Swaddling judgment has provided useful clarification of the factors to be used in assessing habitual residence, and guidance has been issued to adjudication officers. Work on the review of the habitual residence test is almost complete and we expect to bring forward our recommendations for its future soon.

Ms King: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Given that the Swaddling judgment will not be relevant or bring relief to those who, like the majority of my constituents, travel beyond the European Union, can my hon. Friend give a more specific date for the outcome of the review, or at least undertake that it will come at the earliest opportunity? Will she explain why the Government's estimated savings as a result of the HRT have increased significantly over the past year and a half, especially because, at least in my constituency, much money is paid out to families made destitute, either under the National Assistance Act 1948 or the Children Act 1989?

Angela Eagle: My hon. Friend makes a good point about switching resources rather than making savings; we are investigating that issue as part of the review. In fact, the estimated savings have nearly halved because of a different way of assessing them: originally, the average time that people who failed the test were assumed to have been denied access to benefits was calculated as being 26 weeks. We believe that that is too long and does not reflect reality, so that calculation has been reduced to 13 weeks. That is why the estimated savings from the habitual residence test have gone down rather than up.

As part of the review, we are considering the effect of the test on UK nationals, which I suspect was a wholly unintended result of the little pantomime performed by the deputy leader of the Tory party, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), at the Tory party conference. From today's papers, I learn that he has also changed his mind on other fundamentals and decided that privatisation has nothing to do with public service—hallelujah, we welcome converts.

Pension Reform

9. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): What assessment he has made of the effect of his pension reform plans on the level of means testing in the benefits system. [79736]

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): The proposals in our pensions Green Paper are designed to ensure that an employee contributing for a full working life will receive a pension on retirement above the minimum income guarantee. We estimate that, by 2050, the number of those receiving the minimum income guarantee will be about one in four, or fewer. That proportion would have been one in three if the policies of the previous Government had been maintained.

Mr. Bercow: The Minister's reply to my question is lamentably inadequate. Why can he not accept the point—which is so transparently obvious that only an extraordinarily clever person could fail to see it—that, by penalising those who save and rewarding those who do not, his pension reform proposals will discourage thrift and encourage dependency?

Mr. Timms: Last week, some 1,400 pensioners in Buckingham who are in receipt of income support secured a substantial boost to their income of at least £160 a year as a result of the minimum income

guarantee. The Chancellor has announced that there will be a further earnings-related increase in the minimum income guarantee next year. If the hon. Gentleman thinks his constituents should receive a lower income than the Government propose, I believe his constituents would like an explanation as to why that is so.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the issue of pensioners who have saved modest amounts. We are examining the saving limits for the minimum income guarantee—which were a feature of the previous Government's income support regime—and considering the option of a modest income disregard. We want to improve the incentives to save—the hon. Gentleman is correct to say that that is very important—which is why we are proceeding in this manner.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I greatly welcome the Government's proposals on pension reform, which will remove many people from dependency on means-tested benefit. May we be assured that the Government will assist those who will continue to depend on means-tested benefit, both in the shorter and long term, by replacing the many application forms with just one? Many people applying for income support and benefits—such as council tax benefit and housing benefit—lose out because they do not understand the present complex system.

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are considering several ways in which the Benefits Agency and local authorities, in particular, can work together. For example, a very successful pilot scheme in Lewisham allows people to claim local authority benefit, council tax benefit, housing benefit and Benefits Agency benefit simultaneously. My hon. Friend is correct to say that the present system is too confusing, and we aim to make it easier for people to access.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Is it not a fact that the Government have broken two clear pledges? First, they pledged to cut the cost of social security which has risen under their proposals and will continue to rise by more than £40 billion over the next three years. The Government's second pledge was to break the dependency culture and, although the Prime Minister referred to it endlessly, they have not delivered that promise. As my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) said, the Government are driving more and more people on the margins away from an instinct to save and into dependency on the state. In so doing, the Government will increase the cost of social security. The people who will meet that cost are those on the margins who will pay more tax as a result. The Government have failed totally. Will they now apologise?

Mr. Timms: No. Ours is a record of success. We are spending significantly less on social security than the projections of the previous Government suggested. We have halved the rate of benefit growth—which is a significant achievement—and we are tackling the problem of dependency that we inherited from the previous Government. Most importantly, we must have an active welfare system that helps people instead of the passive system that we inherited, and the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill will achieve that transformation. We are tackling the causes of poverty and dependency.

Housing Benefit

10. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): When he expects to bring forward proposals to reform housing benefit. [79737]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): We intend to publish a housing Green Paper later this year that will discuss options to reform housing benefit within the context of housing policy. Any fundamental reform would be a long-term project likely to take a number of years to progress. In the shorter term, we will continue to consider changes that make housing benefit fairer, better administered and more secure and that promote work incentives.

Mr. Prentice: News of the Green Paper is very encouraging, especially in Pendle. At the beginning of the decade, my constituency spent about £1 million on housing benefit and, some nine years later, we are spending £9 million—which is a ninefold increase in less than a decade. I and many of my constituents are concerned about rogue landlords who pick up properties for a song—sometimes paying as little as £3,000 or £4,000. It is not unusual for landlords to achieve a yearly return on their capital investment of about 35 per cent, so huge sums of public money are being tipped into their pockets. I urge my hon. Friend to address that issue urgently and introduce proposals as rapidly as she can for a root and branch reform of the entire system.

Angela Eagle: I thank my hon. Friend for that observation. He is correct: there are some difficulties. I refer him to a consultation paper on the regulation of houses in multiple occupation that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing published recently. He must also be aware that the reform of housing benefit involves many complex issues and concerns the very roof over people's heads, so we must proceed carefully. The changes that we shall make will be for the better.

Pensions

11. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): How many responses he received by 31 March to his consultation paper on pensions. [79738]

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): We had received more than 550 responses by 31 March, and several more have arrived since. Wide support has been expressed for the objectives set out in the Green Paper and for our approach, which is based on the three interlinked pillars of the minimum income guarantee, the state second pension and the stakeholder pension scheme.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Minister accept that there has been strong representation, not least by Age Concern, about the fact that the Green Paper says nothing about raising the basic pension? Age Concern, on behalf of pensioners, takes the clear view, as do all the pensioners in my constituency who have spoken to me, that at the very least older pensioners must be given a higher basic state pension—we had that debate last month—or all

pensioners should have a higher basic state pension. Is there any point in Age Concern or any pensioners' organisation putting those views to the Government, or are Ministers saying that there will be absolutely no increase in the state pension and that it will be topped up only if pensioners' other income makes it necessary for them to have an additional, means-tested benefit? Will people receive an increase only if they go through the means test?

Mr. Timms: About 170 of the responses that we have received commented on the level of the basic state pension. Our pledge neither to means-test nor to privatise the basic state pension has wide support, but as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, many people would like the state pension to be linked with earnings. Our commitment is to uprate the basic state pension at least in line with prices; we have honoured that commitment, and pensions will continue to increase according to that method.

The cost of increasing pensions in line with earnings would be an additional £750 million every year, and within 10 years it would cost an additional £8 billion a year. That is not economically realistic. Rather than give the impression that the link with earnings might be restored, it is better to be honest with people and instead devise a credible strategy, as we have done, for improving pensioner incomes.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): With reference to consultation, what advice do the Government give to employers, employees and those providing pension fund schemes on the arrangements to be made in the next two years before the new stakeholder arrangements come on-stream? The Government have demonstrated their moral disapproval of personal pension schemes, even though many of them now offer full transparency. People will progress upwards in the work force, so if they do not want a personal pension, what are they to do in the next two years?

Mr. Timms: People should be saving in a pension. That is why the Financial Services Authority has issued advice about the terms under which personal pensions should be sold in the next couple of years. Stakeholder schemes will be available from April 2001, and if people then choose to switch into a stakeholder pension, they will suffer no penalty. We welcome that advice. The assurance about what will happen in two years means that it is entirely appropriate for people to start saving in a personal pension scheme now.

Winter Fuel Allowance

14. **Mr. Frank Roy** (Motherwell and Wishaw): What arrangements he is making for paying the winter fuel allowance for 1999–2000. [79741]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): Next winter, we plan to make all payments before Christmas. That will ensure that, when the winter starts, the money is in pensioners' hands and available when they need it.

Mr. Roy: I thank the Minister for her reply, which will be welcomed by pensioners during the long, cold winter, particularly in Scotland, where winter lasts longer and is colder. Does she agree that the fivefold increase in the winter fuel allowance is evidence that, step by step, the Government are delivering for Scottish pensioners and those throughout the United Kingdom?

Angela Eagle: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He is right to point out that the fivefold increase in the winter fuel payment is an extension of the universal benefit principle to all pensioners. By the end of this Parliament, that will result in almost £3 billion being spent to ensure that no pensioner has to worry about turning up the heating during spells of cold weather. That increase will make a genuine contribution to the quality of life of all Britain's pensioners.

Carers

16. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): What recent assessment he has made of the availability of benefits for carers. [79744]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): Benefits are available for carers who are unable to work full-time because of heavy caring commitments, and for carers on low incomes. Expert benefit advice for individual carers is available at district offices of the Benefits Agency and via telephone helplines. Our proposals for the state second pension will benefit carers who are unable to contribute to a second pension because of their responsibilities. Our proposals for single work-focused gateway interviews will provide information and benefit advice to carers.

Mr. Baker: On a genuine and serious note, may I tell the Minister that carers in my constituency have contacted me and are very concerned about proposals in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, particularly those relating to the abolition of severe disablement allowance and restrictions on incapacity benefit? They are concerned that carers will be pushed into poverty by having to rely on means-tested benefits. What reassurance can the Minister give the constituents who have contacted me that the Government's proposals are not simply a cost-driven exercise but will be fair to carers?

Mr. Bayley: The first reassurance that I can give the hon. Gentleman, and hon. Members throughout the House, is that the exercise is not cost-driven. Indeed, expenditure on disability benefits will rise by about £1 billion over the lifetime of this Parliament.

On carers specifically, I reassure the hon. Gentleman that we intend to apply the changes to the contribution conditions for incapacity benefit in such a way that people in receipt of invalid care allowance will not be disadvantaged. If they were eligible for incapacity benefit through national insurance contributions when they started caring, that eligibility will remain throughout their receipt of ICA.

New Deal for Disabled People

19. **Mr. Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What assessment he has made of the performance of the new deal for disabled people's innovative schemes. [79747]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): We are funding a number of innovative schemes under the new deal for disabled people to test new ways of helping people with disabilities who want to work. Ten schemes are currently in operation, and we announced funding for a further 14 last month. It is too early to assess the effect of the schemes. An independent research organisation has been appointed to evaluate them formally, and preliminary findings will be available towards the end of this year.

Mr. White: The Minister will be aware that, although the schemes will be welcomed by many people, many disabled people will be cynical because the benefits system operated by the previous Government led to many of them being put on the scrap heap. Many disabled groups are finding that their members' top level disability living allowance is being removed. Will he outline how he intends to deal with the cynicism among disabled people and target people who need those welcome schemes but who, at the moment, may feel that they will not help?

Mr. Bayley: The purpose of the personal adviser pilots in the new deal for disabled people is to provide advice to disabled people who want to work on the benefit entitlement of seeking a job, which in-work benefits they would receive if they took a job and on their long-term entitlement to out-of-work disability benefits if the post did not work out. Help is also provided with the job search and any training that those people might need to get the job that they seek.

There are 1 million people out of work and on disability benefits who say that they wish that they had the opportunity to work. Under the system that operated before the election, they were simply consigned to a life on benefits. Our new deal for disabled people will give them the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations and to get the jobs that they want.

Social Fund Payments

20. **Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): If he will make a statement on whether he will consider a further application by Miss H. McNulty for a social fund payment; and if a home visit will take place in this case. [79748]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): An application for a social fund payment can be made at any time, but, in the case of a repeat application for either a community care grant or a crisis loan, a social fund officer cannot consider making an award for the same need unless more than 26 weeks have elapsed since the previous decision, or there has been a change in the applicant's circumstances.

In the case to which my hon. Friend refers, a home visit took place on 22 March.

Mr. Winnick: Is my hon. Friend aware that I am far from satisfied about how this case has been processed? My constituent, a very elderly person who is virtually house-bound, should have been treated very differently, and the application should have been granted. As I understand the position, no home visit took place prior to the refusal of the application. May I ask my hon. Friend, therefore, whether she will look further into this matter? I have already advised my constituent when she should make a further application.

Angela Eagle: I am quite happy to consider the situation further. I am aware of the case and it is not a surprise to me that my hon. Friend has such views, because he has not been backward in coming forward, if I may put it that way, to tell me about them. I do not want to discuss that case on the Floor of the House, but if he wants to see me, we can discuss it in more detail.

Welfare to Work

21. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths** (Edinburgh, South): What support is being given to people with disabilities who wish to move from welfare to work. [79749]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): Our strategy for helping people with disabilities who want to work involves a number of initiatives. We are providing active help and encouragement for people to move towards work; we are addressing barriers to work in the benefit system; we are taking steps to make sure that work pays; and we are promoting radical change in the workplace to ensure equality and opportunity.

Mr. Griffiths: I welcome that answer from the Minister, but does he share the concern of disabled people who move into work that if they are not successful in retaining their place, they may be forced to suffer a reduction in benefits, which they feel to be wrong? What proposals do the Government have to tackle that fear?

Mr. Bayley: I share the fear that my hon. Friend has expressed. It is an important point, and it is one of the reasons why, last autumn, the Government extended the linking rule for incapacity benefit from the eight weeks that we had inherited to 52 weeks, so that people may start a job in the knowledge that, if it does not work out—because their health does not permit them to carry on working or for any other reason—they can return to the higher rate of incapacity benefit without waiting for the normal qualification period.

We are introducing on a pilot basis—in the Lothian region among other places—several other measures to make it easier for disabled people to come off benefits and go into work with confidence, not least a work trial of up to three weeks in which someone can enter the labour market, undertake a job but remain on benefits for the first three weeks to see whether that job works out.

Child Care Costs

24. **Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Canning Town): What plans he has to assist parents with the costs of bringing up children. [79752]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): From April 2000, child benefit will be worth at least £15 for older children and £10 for subsequent children. These are above-inflation increases, which will help all children and build on this year's largest ever increase in the eldest child rate, which is already benefiting nearly 6.5 million families.

Recipients of income-related benefits will also get nearly £6 per week extra for each child under age 11—an increase of almost 30 per cent., which will help nearly 1 million families.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: I am grateful to the Minister for her response. She obviously agrees that the best way to help families is to help children. I am sure that she is aware that there is wide support for the recent increases in child benefit, and child premiums for income-related benefits. Will she ensure that when the Government's proposals for the reform of the Child Support Agency emerge, they will continue the theme of offering practical help to children?

Angela Eagle: One of the most pernicious legacies from our predecessors was the very large number of children growing up in poverty—something which the increases that I have just mentioned will have a real effect on tackling. I thank my hon. Friend for his question and assure him that at the forefront of our mind in planning for changes to the organisation of the CSA is the important notion that children deserve the support of both parents, whether they live together or separately.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Can the Minister confirm that single parents with young children who wish to return to full-time education are entitled to child care for a period of one year only, and that that effectively precludes them from taking two-year courses, such as A-levels?

Angela Eagle: That is more a matter for Education Ministers. We do what we can to co-ordinate policy across Government Departments, but it is certainly not the case that social security benefits exist to pay for education.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The Prime Minister has undertaken to eliminate child poverty within 20 years. How many children were living in poverty when the Government took office, and how many are living in poverty today?

Angela Eagle: One in three children were living in poverty when the Government took office. We have estimated that as result of the policy changes and benefit increases to which I have referred, 700,000 children will be lifted out of poverty by the end of this Parliament.

Fraud

25. **Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): What plans he has to improve co–ordination between the Benefits Agency and local authorities in combating fraud. [79753]

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): By working in partnership, councils and the Benefits Agency can fight fraud more effectively, as well as give a better service to the public. That is why we have earmarked funding in each Benefits Agency area to develop stronger links with local councils. Detailed agreements are in place which give each party a clear statement of how co-operation should work in practice. We are installing terminals in council offices to give access to Department of Social Security computers.

Ms Stuart: I thank the Minister for that answer. Can he tell me whether any councils have already applied to use the powers which were given to them in February, to ask the Royal Mail not to redirect housing benefit, and whether the Department will monitor the success of the scheme?

Mr. Timms: Yes. We certainly will monitor the success of the scheme. I do not have the information in front of me to enable me to tell the House how many local authorities so far have taken up the power to which my hon. Friend has referred. The power was introduced in sections 20 and 21 of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997, to prevent fraudulent claimants using the Royal Mail's postal redirection arrangements to submit benefit claims from false addresses. It is clearly in everybody's interest that that practice ceases, and we would like to see the power taken up widely. I should tell my hon. Friend that it is possible to data-match our systems and local authority systems with those of the Royal Mail redirection database so that we can see where redirection is taking place and intervene if it is not appropriate.

National Carers Strategy

28. **Mr. Ivor Caplin** (Hove): If he will make a statement about his Department's contribution to the national carers' strategy. [79756]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): The report of the national carers' strategy is an important document for all Government Departments. We are supporting the strategy's main aims and objectives in a number of ways.

Mr. Caplin: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. The strategy has been greatly welcomed by carers in my constituency. In particular they welcome seeing Departments working together. I seek my hon. Friend's assurance that Departments will continue to do so over many years so as to provide carers with what they need in our society.

Mr. Bayley: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. To provide the support that carers need requires a response not only from one Government Department but from many, and from local government and the health service. That is what the carers' strategy, "Caring about Carers", seeks to do. It is designed to provide a cross-Government response so that carers receive more help, and £140 million of additional Government money will back that strategy.

Pensions

29. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What recent representations he has received on the level of retirement pensions. [79757]

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): About 170 of the 550 responses to the pensions Green Paper consultation exercise comment on the level of the state retirement pension.

Mr. Amess: Is the Minister aware that I am inundated by representations from senior citizens in my constituency who tell me that they are now living in poverty as a result

of this rotten Government's policies? Will the Minister address the point that he failed to take up earlier on the level of savings? Will he also tell the House how the Government will fund the second state pension?

Mr. Timms: On the hon. Gentleman's final point, the Green Paper sets out fully how the Government will fund our pension proposals. They are affordable, they are durable and they have been widely welcomed. I hope that when he receives representations from his constituents he draws their attention to the minimum income guarantee, which took effect last week. That has already led to several hundred people having a boost in their incomes.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said at the beginning of Question Time that we are looking again at savings limits governing the receipt of income support for those pensioners with modest savings who are at present just outside the scope of the minimum income guarantee. We are considering the possibility of bringing them within it by changing the limits that we inherited from the previous Government.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The combination of the minimum pension guarantee with council tax benefit and housing benefit will ensure that an individual must save £80,000 to be better off than someone who has saved nothing at all. The Minister said earlier that that figure is inaccurate. Can he say what is the accurate figure?

Mr. Timms: It is an inaccurate figure, because it does not allow for the income that people will receive anyway in retirement, but we are still waiting for an explanation from Conservative Members about why they want the minimum income guarantee to be uprated only in line with prices. What do they have against people on income support? That is what their constituents will want to know.

Fiona Jones

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a brief statement to make. The House will recall that on 22 March, following the conviction of the hon. Member for Newark in the Crown court on a charge of making a false declaration as to election expenses, I stated that the seat had been vacated in accordance with law.

The House will also be aware that the Court of Appeal has since quashed that conviction. The Court of Appeal, however, considered that it had no jurisdiction to go on to rule on whether or not the hon. Lady recovers her seat following the success of her appeal.

This is an unprecedented situation. On the one hand, there are considerations of natural justice. The conviction has been quashed; should not the vacancy also be overturned? On the other hand, whatever the outcome of the appeal, it is the interpretation of the Representation of the People Act 1983 which is crucial.

It is for the courts, not for the House, to interpret the law. I have therefore asked the Attorney-General, on behalf of the House, to seek an authoritative declaration from the High Court on the true construction of the 1983 Act. The court will be invited to make a declaration that, following the decision of the Court of Appeal to quash her conviction, Fiona Jones is entitled to resume her seat.

I understand that the application is being made today. I hope very much that it may be disposed of as speedily as is consistent with fairness and with certainty.

May I add in the interests of Members in all parts of this House that, once this matter has been resolved, I think it would be desirable for this part of our statute law to be reviewed to see whether it cannot be expressed more clearly, so as to avoid this kind of situation in future.

Mr. Joe Ashton (Bassetlaw) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Is it a point of order?

Mr. Ashton: Yes. I should like to ask a question. You have obviously laid down a precedent today, Madam Speaker, and I am not disagreeing with it or raising any matter arising out it, but can you tell us whether the issue is still sub judice? The Tories have said publicly in Newark that they have withdrawn their candidate; so have the Liberals, and they do not want a by-election.

There is obviously a great deal of stuff to be debated, which the media and everybody else are interested in, but we do not know where we stand with the sub judice rule. The appeal took only 12 minutes and the Lord Chief Justice said—as you said, Madam Speaker—that, now that the conviction is quashed, so are the consequences, and he sees no reason why this case should be different from any other. Is the issue debatable anywhere or is it still sub judice?

Madam Speaker: It cannot be sub judice until a date for the hearing has been set down, but I think that, in the best interests of the hon. Lady, Fiona Jones, and of the House, the application to the High Court, which was made on our behalf by the Attorney-General about an hour and a half ago, should now proceed. We should leave it to the High Court to come to us with its decision.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. May I fully endorse your ruling on this issue? However, I understand from the ruling of the court—as I read it in the newspapers—that the court does not wish to confuse its role with that of Parliament. While I fully endorse your ruling, would not it be appropriate for this House to express an opinion, after a brief debate?

Madam Speaker: I understand that view, but I suggest that now that those steps have been taken on behalf of the House and in accordance with the rule of law, which we must uphold, we should await the High Court's decision. I am sure that that is in the best interests of all of us at this time.

Kosovo

[Relevant documents: Minutes of Evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 14th April 1999 (HC 188-ii).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Madam Speaker: In view of the number of hon. Members who want to speak in this important debate, Back-Bench speeches will be limited throughout to 10 minutes.

3.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): Before I turn to the matter of today's debate, may I offer the House the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who had wished to be present at this debate but is currently attending to the Northern Ireland peace talks? I am sure that the whole House wishes him success in that effort.

As we meet for this debate, a second wave of refugees is crossing from Kosovo into the neighbouring countries. Like all those who have made it into Macedonia, Albania or Montenegro in the past three weeks, none of them wanted to leave. All of them have been forced by fear to flee the terror and the brutality that has been visited upon Kosovo by President Milosevic.

Thousands of them have now been interviewed by the remaining members of the Kosovo verification mission, or by one of the United Nations agencies working in the refugee camps. Consistently they tell the same story: of Serb special police ordering them at the point of a gun to leave their homes within five minutes; of villages being burnt as they left; sometimes, of young men being separated from their families and disappearing; occasionally, of young women separated and subjected to systematic rape.

Some made their way on foot over the hillsides. Among them were pregnant women, some of whom gave birth on the journey under the sky. Others were forced on to the shuttle trains that plied back and forth from Pristina to the Macedonian border—2,000 to 3,000 per train, all standing, all too close to breathe in comfort, for a slow, seven-hour journey without water or sanitation.

We are witnessing in Kosovo the largest forced deportation in Europe since the time of Stalin or Hitler. This exodus is not the result of spontaneous acts of brutality; it was planned in Belgrade and is co-ordinated from Belgrade. That does not acquit those in the field from their own responsibility for the crimes that they commit. It is no defence against a war crime to plead that one was only following orders.

Tomorrow, I shall meet Judge Arbour, the chief prosecutor of the International War Crimes Tribunal. I shall promise her Britain's full co-operation in bringing to justice those who have stained Kosovo with ethnic cleansing and genocide. I shall be handing over a dossier of material with information on multiple atrocities from the past three weeks of killing and ethnic cleansing. I shall pass to her all the names that we have of the commanders of the army and police units who have been present when those crimes took place. I shall share with her our photographs of the recently disturbed earth where we fear mass graves may be found. I shall offer her any information that we have that could help her to pursue the chain of command for those crimes all the way to the top in Belgrade.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My right hon. Friend's words are all very well, but what will they do other than make the tough Serbs fight to the death in the knowledge that they will have to appear before a war crimes tribunal?

Mr. Cook: First, they are not just words. I have outlined the action that I shall take tomorrow and the action that I am taking to enable the International War Crimes Tribunal to do its work. My hon. Friend has repeatedly stressed the need to consult the United Nations. May I remind him that the war crimes tribunal was set up by the United Nations and is on the authority of the United Nations? There is an obligation on all of us, especially the permanent members of the Security Council, to make sure that the war crimes tribunal can do its work.

These are no idle threats. As a result of the rigorous and robust policy that we have taken against war crimes in Bosnia, we now have in The Hague awaiting trial half of all the war criminals currently indicted in former Yugoslavia. We will pursue those guilty of war crimes in Kosovo with the same vigour and the same results.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): For the last month, the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister have been talking in euphemisms: something turned into an art form by President Clinton. The Foreign Secretary has referred to the International War Crimes Tribunal. Is he now ready to admit that this country is involved in a war?

Mr. Cook: We have not declared war on Serbia. I say to my hon. Friends that, as I keep repeating, the people who represent and work for Serbia in this country are perfectly welcome here because we have not declared war on Serbia. Nor do we seek a war in which— *[Interruption.]* I am not entirely sure what the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) finds funny in this subject; it is a serious matter on which the lives of thousands of people turn.

We are not seeking a war against Belgrade, or to defeat Belgrade in war. We are seeking, through our military action, the limited—but nevertheless essential—task of enabling those dispossessed from Kosovo to return to their homes under international protection.

In the meantime, Britain and our allies have responded to the terror in Kosovo on two fronts. The first and most pressing of these is meeting the urgent humanitarian need of the victims of the terror. I hope that I can speak for all in the House—whatever their views on the conflict—when I record our appreciation of the magnificent efforts by our troops in Macedonia to meet the needs of the tidal wave of refugees. In just two days, British troops constructed capacity in camps for 30,000 refugees. Throughout both day and night, soldiers coming off defence duties volunteered to help with the relief work.

The House will be aware that the Government of Macedonia are concerned about the impact of the tide of refugees on the stability of their community. However, I am pleased that the Prime Minister of Macedonia was able

to respond within twelve hours to our plea for a refugee sanctuary in Macedonia under the protection of the international community.

I pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, who was the first Development Minister to visit the region after the exodus, and whose vigorous intervention helped to get things moving on the ground.

The extraordinary and swift generosity of the British public in response to appeals for donations to the refugees demonstrates the profound degree to which our constituents have been moved by their plight. They have already given well over £16 million.

As a Government, we have committed £20 million to the refugee programme—one of the largest national donations. We will also be contributing £27 million as our share of the £170 million which has been agreed by the European Union. The UK contribution to the air bridge into Skopje has alone flown in over 1,300 tonnes of relief supplies.

We are exploring with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees whether there are injured or seriously ill refugees who cannot be cared for within the countries where they have sought refuge. We have today asked the UNHCR for a list of the first twenty people whom we can bring to Britain for intensive medical care. However, there is little support among Kosovar Albanians for a policy of dispersing the refugees to the different corners of the world. The overwhelming ambition of the refugees is to return to Kosovo and to rebuild their own homes.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): The Foreign Secretary has twice mentioned the Government's policy of enabling the population to return to Kosovo. What interests the House more than anything at present is what plans the Government have for making that possible. Will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House—and to the country, for that matter—how the Government plan to enable the population to return to Kosovo?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that he anticipates the very passage in my speech in which I turn to the military campaign intended to secure the return of the Kosovars to Kosovo, the necessary parallel to our humanitarian work.

May I say to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), and to the House, that not one refugee who has made it over the border has said that they fled to avoid the NATO bombing? Not one of them has blamed the bombing for the behaviour of President Milosevic's forces. The view repeatedly and vigorously expressed by their leaders is that the NATO campaign must be pressed home so that they can return home. Earlier today, I met a dozen Kosovar Albanians. Every single one gave the NATO action their full support.

One of those people had been forced to leave Pristina only two weeks ago. He had been one of the last to leave. He described how the city had been emptied by armed men, many of them masked, ordering people to leave their homes. If they thought that the household had any money, they would demand payment of DM5,000 to allow an elderly father to accompany a family; or they would demand to know what price the family would put on being allowed to take their elderly mother with them. He ended his description by saying that the Kosovar Albanians only felt any regret about the NATO operations when bad weather prevented them from attacking the forces of ethnic cleansing.

That sustained campaign is having a real impact on the war machine. We know that President Milosevic's commanders in the field have increasing difficulty in maintaining contact with headquarters because of damage to their communication systems. We know that we have destroyed much of his fuel reserves, and that field officers have to watch the fuel gauge with increasing worry. We have also destroyed half his high-performance aircraft, and the rest have not dared to take to the skies for a long time. As a result, the biggest worry of his army commanders in the field is knowing that they do not have effective air defence, and are vulnerable if they move in the open.

As President Milosevic's war machine becomes weaker, NATO's forces in the theatre are becoming stronger. The number of attack aircraft available for the campaign has doubled since it started, and continues to grow. Time is against President Milosevic. He cannot replace the equipment that he loses, he cannot now refine fuel for his vehicles, and we know that his attempt to call up reservists for the fight in Kosovo has been ignored by more than half those whom he has summoned. Time is our ally. We must have the resolve to take the time, and the measures, that are necessary if we are to complete the task to which we have set our hand.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Over the past four days I have spoken to scores of people in Inverclyde and elsewhere in Renfrewshire, including the mother of a young lad who is serving with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. It would appear from those conversations that the Government have the overwhelming support of people in my constituency and the adjoining one; but again and again I was asked, "How long will the bombing continue?" Is it not likely to last for a considerable time?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend underlines what we all know to be true: that support for intervention has not weakened but grown over the period of the intervention as people have been confronted with the horror that is now taking place in Kosovo. Having met all the NATO foreign ministers, I can tell the House that that experience is repeated throughout the NATO countries, for exactly the same reason.

I cannot give the House a date by which the bombing will be over. I would welcome the opportunity to do so, but to do so would be dishonest. Moreover, it would be to miss the main point, which, as I have said, is that we must secure our objectives. When the bombing stops will be determined by when we secure the critical objective of being able to return the people of Kosovo under our protection. President Milosevic, however, could stop the bombing today if he called a ceasefire, withdrew his troops and allowed the Kosovars to return under the international protection that is now demanded by every international body.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose*—

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent) *rose*—

Mr. Cook: I will give way when I have made some progress with my speech.

[Mr. Cook]

We have tried hard to avoid civilian casualties, but it simply is not possible to conduct a military campaign of the intensity that is needed while at the same time guaranteeing that no civilians will be killed. To pretend otherwise would be dishonest. NATO forces have worked around the clock trying to save the lives of refugees by providing them with shelter and food. We are therefore deeply concerned if any refugees have perished as a result of NATO action, and if there has been a misjudgment, we deeply regret it. However, I will not accept criticism of NATO's action from the very Government in Belgrade who have brutally and deliberately murdered thousands of Kosovars.

The tragedy poses questions not just for NATO, but for President Milosevic. Who was it who made those refugees homeless? What was the terror that made them flee their homes and country? Having burned those homes and forced their occupants to flee the country, it is breathtaking cynicism on the part of President Milosevic to manipulate their deaths as propaganda for his cause.

Mr. Llew Smith: The whole House will be aware of the tragic consequences that follow when missiles fail to hit the intended target. Has any assessment been made of the likely consequences if one of the missiles should miss the target and hit the nuclear power plant at Vinca, near Belgrade? Has any assessment been made of the environmental and ecological damage resulting from the bombing of oil and chemical plants?

Mr. Cook: Of course, we are aware of where the nuclear plant is. Of course, we will take every possible measure, we have succeeded in avoiding it and we will certainly take care that it is nowhere near any missiles. I understand the concerns about the effect on the environment from the petrochemical plant, but if we are to be resolute, and if we are serious about halting the war machine, the best way in which we can hurt and inhibit it is to ensure that it is denied the fuel for tanks and heavy artillery to move around in Kosovo. While I fully understand my hon. Friend's long and honourable concern for the environment, what is happening on the ground in Kosovo to the environment of the Kosovo population dwarfs anything that NATO has done to the environment anywhere in Yugoslavia.

Our objectives are clear: a ceasefire and the withdrawal from Kosovo of Milosevic's army, special police and paramilitary thugs, without which any ceasefire will now not be credible; the return of all refugees and unconditional access for humanitarian relief; and acceptance of the international military force, without which no refugee will have the confidence to return in security, and without which few humanitarian agencies will enter Kosovo.

When the Heads of Government of the European Union met at the end of last week, their text concluded that there could be no compromise on those objectives. Any compromise would be a betrayal of the refugees and would leave them a dispossessed people without a home, without a state and without hope. Any compromise would be a reward for President Milosevic's brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Foreign Secretary says that every effort will be needed and that the campaign of bombing will continue. Will he confirm that page 23 of last year's strategic defence review sets out clearly the fact that our existing commitments in places such as Northern Ireland, and an air, sea and land force campaign such as the one that is now needed in the Balkans, could be sustained for only six months? If the campaign needs to continue beyond six months, will what has been printed in the strategic defence review be seriously revised upwards, so that there is no question that, if the six months were up and the campaign needed to be sustained, there would be no further jeopardy to our armed forces?

Mr. Cook: I assure the House that our defence staff are confident that we can sustain our present campaign. Indeed our plans for the deployment of a ground force within Kosovo do include the assumption that we will be able to wind down our presence in Kosovo after six months because, after that period, it is anticipated that the rapid reaction headquarters will be able to leave Kosovo.

I say to the hon. Lady and to any other Opposition Member who is thinking of getting up on the same point that criticising us over whether we have the resources sits ill with the fact that the previous Government cut the defence budget by a third and cut the number of personnel by a third. It is no good complaining now that there are insufficient resources to do the task that the House wishes the Army to do.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cook: May I continue?

I have heard it argued by hon. Members on both sides of the House that the problem should have been resolved by dialogue and not by military action. I can only say to them that every opportunity was given for dialogue to work. At Rambouillet and then again at Paris we put six weeks into negotiation to create a democratic, self-governing Kosovo within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The Kosovar Albanians signed up to the peace accords in full. The accords fell short of their demand for independence and required the Kosovo Liberation Army to disarm. Nevertheless, they had the courage to make a compromise to reach peace.

The talks broke down solely because of the refusal of Belgrade to negotiate in good faith towards an agreement. No one surveying the ruthless brutality that they have practised since then in Kosovo can now believe that they were ever serious about reaching agreement.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Foreign Secretary explain why between the end of the Rambouillet talks and the start of military action no effort was made by the British and United States Governments to take the issue to the United Nations Security Council and ask the Secretary-General to undertake a diplomatic mission, or to gain its authority before any action was taken?

Mr. Cook: Britain has sponsored three resolutions at the United Nations on the Kosovo crisis. The last of those was the resolution that endorsed the October package to which President Milosevic signed up. That October

package endorsed commitment to a ceasefire in Kosovo and the withdrawal of his tanks, heavy artillery and most of his troops from Kosovo. Every point of that resolution has now been comprehensively broken by President Milosevic. It is Belgrade, not Britain, that is challenging the authority of the United Nations.

When the United Nations Security Council discussed our military action, it supported our objectives by 12 votes to three and supported the action that is being taken. We did not pass straight to military action after the collapse of the Paris talks. Richard Holbrooke went to Belgrade and sought a last-minute conclusion from President Milosevic. If we are now engaged in military action, it is because at every possible point in many opportunities President Milosevic refused to accept dialogue and demonstrated that the only thing that he recognised was the use of force.

At Rambouillet we envisaged the Serb army maintaining a presence in Kosovo. It is implausible that the refugees would now be willing to return while those who have persecuted them remain in occupation of Kosovo. For that reason, we now require a full withdrawal of the Serb army. It will also be necessary for the international community to accept for an interim period a more direct responsibility for Kosovo than was envisaged at Rambouillet. What makes that necessary is the sheer scale of the brutality directed from Belgrade against the Kosovar Albanians. While Milosevic remains in power in Belgrade, it is inconceivable that the Kosovars can accept Belgrade exercising any intervention in their internal affairs.

Until we have rebuilt democratic institutions in Kosovo, its administration will need to be placed in the hands of international bodies, including the UN, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union. The task of reconstruction both of the shattered villages and of a democratic society in Kosovo will take the combined efforts of all those organisations. It would be our preference that a mandate should be provided by a Security Council resolution setting up an international administration for Kosovo.

Mr. Benn: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is outlining a long strategy. Why have not the Government felt it necessary at any stage to invite the House to endorse the policy that he describes? We are left as a sort of press conference, in which we listen to Ministers but have no opportunity to register our views in the Lobby.

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend understates the capacity of the House to debate the issue and his own capacity to question me on the issues, if he describes what we are engaged in as some kind of press conference. In the present Parliament, all the leaderships of the major parties support the action that the Government are taking. It is traditional in such circumstances for the House to debate the matter on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. This is the second debate that I have opened on this subject since the campaign began. The Prime Minister has made two full statements to the House, and in addition my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made an emergency statement one night at 10 o'clock, after a vote. At every successive stage since military action commenced—and at every stage of the peace talks that preceded that action—we have consulted the House and reported back to it. I do not believe that the House can reasonably complain that its interests have not been fully taken into account.

Mr. Benn: Madam Speaker, may I register a point with you?

Madam Speaker: Order. Is it a point of order? The right hon. Gentleman cannot register a point with me, but must use a form to which I can respond and on which I can take action.

Mr. Benn: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You have been very courageous in defending the rights of the House and of dissent. However, I ask you to give consideration to the idea that Parliament must be unanimous if party leaders agree because, were that to be the case, the history of the House would be quite different.

Madam Speaker: It is an interesting point, but it is certainly not a matter for me.

Mr. Cook: I was also interested to observe that my right hon. Friend's observation drew particular cheers from Opposition Members.

It is right that the international community should take responsibility for the people of Kosovo because, overwhelmingly, the nations of the world share the same revulsion as our people at the atrocities that have been committed in Kosovo. Last week in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, there was a vote on a resolution condemning the atrocities, demanding that the war crimes tribunal be allowed access to Kosovo, and that Belgrade withdraw its troops and agree to a settlement based on the Rambouillet accords.

The resolution was drafted and proposed by the Muslim states in the UN Commission. We should remember that the countries of the Islamic world, and our own Muslim citizens in Britain, are watching to see whether Europe will respect the rights of a European Muslim community and act vigorously to restore their security.

That resolution was carried in Geneva with 44 nations voting for it and only one nation—Russia—voting against. It was a forceful measure of the balance of international opinion in support of our objectives.

I am sorry that Russia isolated itself on that occasion and on others when Kosovo has been debated. Russia played a full part alongside us at Rambouillet in drafting the peace accords and in trying to broker agreement to them. We want Russia to be a partner in securing a settlement that delivers on our objectives.

There is the same wish on the part of the Government of Russia. I spoke to the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, following his meeting in Oslo last week with Madeleine Albright. He confirmed that they had found a wide area of common ground. Indeed, Russia has only one substantive area of disagreement with the NATO objectives. Although Russia accepts that there must be an international presence in Kosovo at the end of the conflict, it is still not prepared to say that it must be a military one.

Frankly, I do not believe that it will be possible to persuade the refugees to return without a credible military presence. I hope that Russia will agree to take part in it and work alongside our troops, as Russian troops do at

[Mr. Cook]

present in Bosnia. In the meantime we will continue close dialogue with the Government of Russia to see whether we can close the remaining gap between us.

If we can secure agreement with Russia, that would unblock the path to progress through the Security Council. Already, as I have told the House, 12 of the 15 members of the Security Council share our objectives and support our campaign.

The statement last week by the UN Secretary-General helpfully restates our objectives as the necessary basis of any political settlement. I share the view of Kofi Annan, who dismissed the claim that the international community has no business intervening because Yugoslavia is a sovereign state. As Kofi Annan firmly expressed it, the rights defended by the UN are the rights of people, and no Government should be able to take away those rights by force simply by claiming that it has the sovereign power to do so.

Yugoslavia is ringed by seven countries. Since the campaign began I have spoken to the Foreign Ministers of each of them. All their Governments are firm in the view that NATO is right to make a stand against President Milosevic, and they share our objectives.

A positive feature of the past month has been the growing co-operation among the other countries of the Balkans, and between them and western Europe. That development must not cease when the immediate crisis in Kosovo ends. NATO is examining how we can reinforce security for those countries by intensifying our co-operation through partnership for peace.

The European Union has proposed a stability pact with the other countries of the region. It proposes that we help to build a civic society and promote political reform through widening the programmes that we fund in the region, and that we boost these countries' economic and trade links with Europe by accelerating their agreements on association with us.

Serbia is ringed by countries which are all now deepening their links with modern Europe. All those countries enjoy the perspective of broadening political freedom and eventual economic progress.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I will give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but this must be the last intervention that I take.

Mr. Clarke: If I understood the Foreign Secretary correctly, he said that the Government's policy is that the territory of Kosovo should be administered internationally for an indefinite period. Is that the Government's settled policy? Has it been agreed by all the allies taking part in the operation, and by the neighbouring states to which he referred? If there is to be international administration, is it to be by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, by the United Nations or by the European Union? If that has not been settled, how will progress be made?

Mr. Cook: I said that all those organisations must be involved. Frankly, it will take the resources of all those organisations to take on the task of reconstruction in Kosovo, including not only physical rebuilding but the creation of democratic institutions. The model for that is foreshadowed in the Rambouillet peace accords, which foresaw exactly such an operation, with the OSCE, the European Union and the United Nations working together to create a democratic, self-governing Kosovo; although in the wake of the past four weeks it will have to be a much more hands-on operation than we envisaged at Rambouillet.

That is the view of Her Majesty's Government, and it is a view on which we have close discussions with our major allies. From my conversations with the Ministers of Germany, Italy, France and the United States, to whom I speak every night, I believe that it is widely shared among our allies.

I was describing to the House how the countries of the region are developing their links with the European Union. The contrast with the fate of the Serbian people could not be clearer. In the 10 years in which President Milosevic has been in power, the average income of the people of Serbia has halved, and their freedoms have been extinguished with the successive closures of the independent media. Ultimately, the greatest threat to President Milosevic is that even he cannot hide for ever from his people the truth that he and his politics stand between them and the modern Europe.

We want the Serb people also to be able to join us in that modern Europe, but it is built on the principle of respect for the equal rights of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic identity, and on recognition that cultural diversity is not a weakness but a strength.

Mr. Robathan *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I said that I would not give way again.

We cannot embrace Serbia in that modern Europe so long as Belgrade pursues policies that are based on a doctrine of ethnic superiority that the rest of Europe rejected half a century ago.

At the end of this week, my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Defence and the Prime Minister and I will represent Britain at the NATO summit in Washington. That summit will commemorate the birth of NATO 50 years ago, in the aftermath of the second world war. At that time, the free nations of the world surveyed the horrors that they had discovered in occupied Europe and said, "Never again"; yet in the past weeks we have again borne witness to forced deportation by train, thousands of refugees starving in squalid huddles and pathetic masses shorn of their homes and their papers for no reason but their ethnic identity. Had we taken no action we would have been complicit in those evils.

NATO was born out of the defeat of fascism. Fifty years later, we cannot tolerate the rebirth of fascism in our continent. That is why our service men are in action over Kosovo and why the House must support that action until we have reversed the ethnic cleansing and enabled the people of Kosovo to return to their homes in safety.

4.10 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): When the House last met to debate the fate of Kosovo, our mood was sombre. In the two and a half weeks that have elapsed

since, the mood both in the House and in the country has darkened. It is, of course, true that we all continue to be deeply moved by the intense images of suffering that fill our television screens and newspapers. Each day brings forth accounts of human misery and inhuman cruelty more vivid and violent than the day before.

The Opposition continue to support the men and women of our armed forces, to whose skill, courage and devotion to duty we owe so much. We recognise the efforts of those whose back-up work is so crucial, and, of course, the anxieties of the families of those engaged in front-line action. We pay tribute to them all, and to those military and civilian personnel who have done, and are doing, so much so selflessly and so heroically to help the refugees. For anyone who may have been tempted to think that mankind, at least in Europe, has put behind it the sort of atrocities that so defiled our continent 50 years ago, these events have been the most dire return to dreadful reality.

We continue to support the Government. We continue to believe that it was right to take action against the regime that has inflicted so much terror on those whom it regards as its own citizens. As I said in our last debate, now is not the time to go over the history of NATO's involvement and its nature, though there will come a time after the fighting has stopped when that task will need to be undertaken. However, there are questions which can and should be asked, and answered, now.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): I am grateful for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's opening statement of general support. In that context, will he totally dissociate himself from the remarks of the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), who called for the sacking of Sir Charles Guthrie?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman should know that there are different views in all quarters of this House. This House is not a rubber stamp. It is its duty to scrutinise the Government. Those whose views differ from those of the Government and Opposition Front-Bench teams are entitled to be heard with respect. I am making my views absolutely clear, and the hon. Gentleman should understand that those with different views are perfectly entitled to have their say. The existence of this conflict does not relieve the House of its duty to scrutinise the Government's actions and to seek clarity in the explanation of those actions: clarity about their objectives; about the methods that the Government seek to employ to achieve them; and about the progress, or lack of it, that is being made.

When the Prime Minister first came to the House, he said that the primary objective of NATO's actions was

"to avert what would otherwise be a humanitarian disaster in Kosovo."—[*Official Report*, 23 March 1999; Vol. 328, c. 161.]

Three weeks later it is clear—regrettably, most unhappily, but clear none the less—that that objective has not been achieved. Of course, it is true, as Ministers rightly tell us, that the responsibility for the humanitarian disaster that has occurred rests with Milosevic. Of course, it is not the case, with the exception of those ghastly accidents that are the inevitable companions of military action, that the responsibility is NATO's. Of course, it is also true that there were atrocities and a humanitarian disaster before the NATO bombing commenced, but no one could describe the events on the ground during the past three weeks as anything other than a humanitarian disaster.

Although I have no doubt that much damage has been done to Milosevic's military machine, and although I would be the last person to minimise the impact of the NATO campaign, we must nevertheless face facts, and one of those deeply unpalatable facts is that NATO's primary objective—to prevent a humanitarian disaster—has not been achieved. That must be the starting point for any honest examination as to how we should now proceed. There is nothing to be gained in confusing aspiration with achievement, or in mistaking what is desirable for what has been done.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): My right hon. and learned Friend is right, because, although the moral culpability for the cleansing of Kosovo lies with Milosevic, is it not also true that, by withdrawing the monitors and commencing the bombing action, NATO gave Milosevic an opportunity and an excuse? Had the bombing not started, the probability is that we would not have seen the cleansing that has taken place; the culpability rests with Milosevic, but surely we also need to recognise the facts.

Mr. Howard: We shall never know quite to what extent Milosevic would have continued with the ethnic cleansing that he had undoubtedly already started before the NATO bombing commenced. As I said, that ethnic cleansing—those atrocities, that humanitarian disaster—had begun and was clearly under way before the NATO bombing commenced.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): I am anxious that we should deal with that point, because a number of Members—not least those with constituencies such as mine where many refugees have arrived during the past eight to 10 years—also remember that, before the events in Kosovo began, there were 1 million refugees from that area. One of the reasons why we are having difficulty at present is that previously the ethnic cleansing happened slowly so it was easy to ignore it. Now it is happening fast and we cannot help but see it. However, ethnic cleansing happening slowly is just as bad as ethnic cleansing that happens fast.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point.

As I said, we must have clarity. First and foremost, we must be clear as to what NATO's objectives now are. On 23 March the Prime Minister said that, to avoid NATO action,

"Milosevic must do what he promised to do last October—end the repression, withdraw his troops to barracks, get them down to the levels he agreed, and withdraw from Kosovo the tanks, heavy artillery and other weapons he brought into Kosovo early last year. He must agree to the proposals set out in the Rambouillet accords, including a NATO-led ground force."—[*Official Report*, 23 March 1999; Vol. 328, c. 162-63.]

We must be clear as to the extent to which those remain NATO's objectives.

I welcome what the Foreign Secretary said this afternoon about the need for a total withdrawal of Serb forces. That differs from those original objectives, but, in my judgment, that difference is entirely justified. I welcome, too, what the right hon. Gentleman said about the status of Kosovo after the cessation of the fighting. However, he fell far short of answering the questions put to him by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member

[Mr. Howard]

for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). We need to know to what extent what the Foreign Secretary told us this afternoon about that post-fighting status of Kosovo has been agreed with the other 18 members of the NATO alliance and with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union and the United Nations. My right hon. and learned Friend asked some reasonable questions and they deserve to be answered. We should be told, too, how what the Foreign Secretary told us this afternoon is to be squared with the arguments deployed by President Clinton yesterday in his article in *The Sunday Times*, in which he put the case against independence for Kosovo after the fighting is over.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): My right hon. and learned Friend is making a most important point. Will he seek an answer from the Foreign Secretary to the fundamental question of whether there is not a real danger that, if we enable the Kosovar Albanians to return to their homes and then frustrate their political aspirations thereafter, we shall incur their long-term odium, which might perpetuate conflict in the region?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend's question is a valid one and is implied in the point that I have just made.

We need to know more about the nature of the force that would ultimately monitor and police the situation in Kosovo. The Prime Minister has said that any force would need to be NATO-led, but the NATO statement of 12 April said merely that Milosevic must accept the

"stationing in Kosovo of an international military presence",

and similar words were used by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and by the Foreign Ministers of the European Union. Indeed, the French Defence Minister has said that it is possible

"that a future peacekeeping force for Kosovo may not be under NATO's direct control."

That is a matter of the greatest importance. Does the British Government agree with the French Defence Minister's statement? Is it now the case, as the Prime Minister appeared to suggest yesterday, that the removal of Milosevic is now an explicit objective of NATO policy? There are also questions about how the objectives are to be achieved.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Following on from that last point, could that not be the kernel of a peace settlement, given that, at Rambouillet, the Serbs were prepared to accept autonomy, but not a NATO-led peacekeeping force? Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that we should be prepared to compromise on that point and have a peacekeeping force that is, at least in part of Kosovo, led by neutral nations? Is that a point worth considering?

Mr. Howard: Things have moved on since Rambouillet and I share the view that the Government have expressed, that, for example, partition of Kosovo would not be a satisfactory outcome. The Prime Minister was absolutely unequivocal in the answer he gave in the House to that question only a few days ago, and I agree with his views on that point.

We need answers to questions about how the objectives which the Government have set themselves are to be achieved. The fact that there has been a substantial reinforcement of NATO's air strike capability must be taken as an indication that the original assessment of what was likely to happen was too optimistic. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will comment on that when he winds up the debate.

I also hope that the right hon. Gentleman will bring clarity to the crucial question of ground forces, where there is much scope for confusion. I suspect that there would be widespread support for the intervention of ground troops to keep a peace that had already been agreed, but both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have repeatedly ruled out the use of ground troops to fight their way in to impose a settlement. Yet, even in that respect, the reasoning is not as clear as it should be. It is one thing to reject that option, as the Prime Minister did, because of the scale of the force that would be needed and the very high risk of substantial casualties. However, it is quite another to suggest that the reason why ground troops are not being used is, in the words of the US Defence Secretary last week, that

"There was not a consensus in the NATO alliance to do anything but an air campaign",

or, in the words of the Foreign Secretary yesterday, that

"it would take months to assemble"

the necessary number of ground troops, and we

"don't have two or three months to wait."

Yesterday, the Secretary-General of NATO gave a fourth different justification when he said:

"At this point we think the air campaign is enough. The military authorities who are leading the campaign think that it is enough. Therefore we are not going to change the policy now. But if the moment comes and it is necessary I am sure that the countries which belong to NATO will be ready to do it."

We must have clarity.

We must also be told more about the concept of intervention in what the Foreign Secretary calls a "permissive environment". That did not feature in the Government's original objectives. Are any preparations now under way to assemble a larger force? Would not such preparations need to be made now if the force were to be used any time this year? I hope that the Defence Secretary will tell us more about that tonight.

Mr. Dalyell: As to clarity, is the right hon. and learned Gentleman in favour of contemplating introducing ground troops? The port of Thessalonika has denied access, as has the port of Piraeus following the statements by the mayor of Athens on this subject; there is complete opposition from Macedonia; and the Hungarians, for their own reasons involving Hungarian minorities in Yugoslavia, are not willing to contemplate such a move. How will one get a ground army into Yugoslavia without crossing mountains that are 6,000 ft high using the incredibly useless infrastructure of Albania? How will that operation be achieved?

Mr. Howard: I do not underestimate the difficulties involved. I have said clearly that ground troops could be employed in a variety of different circumstances. I think it is simplistic of the hon. Gentleman to refer to that remark and then pose a series of questions about the deployment of troops in only one set of circumstances.

I hope that the Defence Secretary will tell us more this evening about how the Government—

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I have taken many interventions, so I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me if I continue.

I hope that the Defence Secretary will tell us more about how the Government now view the role of the KLA. The United States Defence Secretary was reported as saying that, as a result of the bombing campaign, the military balance would shift

"decisively in favour of the KLA."

He said that, over time, the KLA would be in a position to defeat Milosevic's army. Do the British Government share that view and do they seek to facilitate that development?

As to the length of the campaign, it is, alas, the case that the prediction made by the Defence Secretary on 25 March, when he said,

"As the situation improves, we will look to reduce numbers."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1999; Vol. 328, c. 617].

has not been borne out by events. The United States Administration have accepted that the campaign will be very lengthy. Do the Government agree? I believe the British people are both realistic about the possible time scale of the campaign and resolute about the need to see it through. However, the Government should be open and honest about their expectations.

There has been some confusion about the diplomatic dimension of recent events. I hope that the Defence Secretary will tell us a little more about the German peace initiative. What consultation took place with other Governments before that initiative was announced? Was the Foreign Secretary consulted? He did not mention the initiative in his speech. What is the current status of that initiative? How do things stand with Russia? Does the Foreign Secretary plan to meet Mr. Chernomyrdin, who has been appointed Russia's peace envoy?

Above all, what more is planned to help the refugees and those countries that are at present receiving them? Are the Government satisfied with the current level of effort demonstrated by the international community? What can be done to reinforce that effort? What more can be done to help Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro? Last week, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister particularly about the continuing pressure on Macedonia and he was assured that we were doing all that we could. Since then, there has been a further influx of refugees across the border. The Macedonian Interior Minister has predicted:

"In six months there will be a total collapse of the economy"

with

"a lot of side-effects for national security, law and order and society."

He accused other countries of doing far too little to shoulder their share of the burden. What has been done to respond to those concerns? After all, the Foreign Secretary acknowledged last week that the Government anticipated Milosevic's spring offensive and knew that it would be accompanied by ethnic cleansing and murder of the civilian population, so they had the foreknowledge required to plan and prepare, in part at least, for the avalanche of human misery that we have seen in the past three weeks.

I shall not deal with the separate, specific details of any of the dreadful events that have so recently occurred, save to emphasise the importance of providing, as soon as possible, full and honest accounts of the incidents in which NATO has been involved. I understand that those accounts are now being given at a NATO press conference, and if that is the case, it is very welcome. Such tragedies are almost inevitable, but that does not make them any less tragic or ease the pain and suffering of any of the victims or their families. However, those events must not undermine the essential justice of NATO's cause and they must not be allowed to weaken its will.

We remain convinced of the justice of that cause. We remain of the view that NATO was right to intervene to try to prevent the horror that is taking place. We must continue to ensure that its action is based on clear, consistent objectives and will be judged against clear criteria. We must ensure that, having embarked on that action, we now see it through.

4.31 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North–East Fife): To have embarked on this intervention is a serious, solemn course of action, but intervention is always a question of choice. It would have been possible to say that these are matters with which we shall not concern ourselves.

In deciding whether we should intervene, we surely have an obligation to give serious consideration to what appear to be the relevant and compelling factors. I suggest that the first of those factors is the degree of wrongdoing with which we are seeking to deal. The second is the extent of our ability to take action. The third is the nature of our interest: is it moral, pragmatic or both? The fourth, which is, perhaps, as compelling as all the others, is the prospect of success. In analysing those factors, it is inevitable that we shall be engaged in value judgments.

In this case, when we ask ourselves what is the degree of wrongdoing, we are surely able to say that it is the most brutal and despicable ethnic cleansing. When we ask ourselves about our ability to take action, surely we can say that the most successful military alliance in history, which has annual defence expenditure of between $350 billion and $400 billion, has the capacity to take action. When we ask ourselves what is our interest, I say that we have both a moral and a pragmatic interest in preventing a flagrant abuse of humanitarian standards and inhibiting instability and preventing bloodshed on the very edge of Europe. What are the prospects of success? The objectives that we have set out can be attained, but it will not be easy and we should not pretend otherwise.

On an earlier occasion, when the Prime Minister made a statement to the House, I said that this was a bad business and might turn out to be a bloody one. I said also that those of us who have advocated the use of military force must live with the responsibility of the consequences and that, once the use of military force had begun, it would require political will to continue when, as there inevitably would be, there were setbacks. Those conclusions are as valid today as they were then.

Liberal Democrats have contended that an air campaign alone would not suffice and that military presence on the ground would be essential for the return of the refugees

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

so that they would have the confidence and courage to return to the comm nities out of which they have been burned, looted and shelled. However, such a military force could not be achieved by agreement between Rambouillet and Paris, and is even less likely to be achieved by agreement now. NATO must therefore be willing to impose its will.

That is why I believe that it was wrong for NATO to rule out the option of ground forces in such an apparently unequivocal way. That allowed the Milosevic regime to exclude from its calculations an option which it would at least have found disconcerting and potentially painful—which might well have made an effective contribution to deterrence. Milosevic should have been left in confusion and doubt about NATO's intentions.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): It may not have been the stated intention at the beginning of this conflict, but there are certainly noises now about using ground troops, so it must obviously be a consideration with the Serbs. If the whole of Kosovo were occupied by ground forces and the Serbs continued nevertheless to resist, would the right hon. and learned Gentleman contemplate the full-scale occupation of Yugoslavia, including Belgrade, by NATO forces, with the likely guerrilla warfare lasting not months but perhaps years?

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman intervened on me on the previous occasion on which we debated this topic, and I was less than gracious in my response. I wrote to him privately afterwards to apologise, and I am happy to take the opportunity to apologise publicly for the fact that I was less than gracious in dealing with his intervention. I shall deal with the intervention that he has just made on the merits on which he made it. I do not believe that anyone here would contemplate the occupation of Belgrade, but the threat and, indeed, perhaps the use, of ground forces will be an essential component in achieving any settlement. I cannot conceive of circumstances in which the threat of use or, indeed, the actual use will not be necessary.

Public opinion has been much more robust on this topic than Governments have estimated. In seeing the terrible scenes that flash across our television screens, which occur with such frequency that we have become almost dulled to their effect, the public understand that, without credible military protection, people who are driven out of their homes will have neither the confidence nor the courage to return.

I wish that it were possible to say that that presence would be obtained by consent, but I do not believe that it will. Whether troops are deployed will of course depend on the strength of the opposition—the success of the air campaign—and the political cohesion of NATO. Those of us who advocate this as a course of action would be very well advised to remember that there came a point in the Gulf war at which the issue before us was whether there should be an assault on Baghdad. That became regarded as impossible to mount because the political cohesion of the international alliance, which had been created in order to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait, would not have survived.

Mr. Benn: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is right that ground troops will be needed—that view is widely shared, and the Americans are now dropping leaflets saying, "We will attack you from land, sea and air", so the process has begun—does he at least share my view that something as grave as that should be put specifically to a vote in the House of Commons? Does he also share my view that to cite his party leader as a supporter of the policy is not a substitute for the House reaching a judgment on such a grave matter?

Mr. Campbell: It may come as something of a surprise to the right hon. Gentleman, but I have some considerable sympathy with his point of view—not only in relation to my party leader, let me hasten to say. The right hon. Gentleman makes a sound point. If we are to ask our young men, and increasingly our young women, to risk their lives in the furtherance of political objectives, surely they ought to know that they have the endorsement of the House of Commons.

Mr. Hogg: On a substantive motion.

Mr. Campbell: On a substantive motion, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman says.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has, of course, a long history of endeavouring to reform the prerogative power, and I have some sympathy with that point of view. It seems to me that, at a time when we are engaged in remarkable constitutional reforms in relation to Scotland and Wales, the adoption of the European convention on human rights into our domestic law and perhaps—if we are fortunate—in due course, freedom of information, there is time for a proper examination of that issue. Although the right hon. Gentleman and I disagree as violently as it is possible to disagree on the merits of this case, I believe that he should have the right to record his vote in relation to that matter on a substantive motion in the House.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell: I am not subject to the 10-minutes rule, but I know that very many hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate so, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall make progress.

We should not underestimate the fragility of public opinion—even although I believe that it has been more robust than Governments have estimated—and we have a duty to explain that, if we were to embark upon a ground campaign, it would not be for a matter of a few weeks, and it would carry a substantial potential for casualties.

We have another duty, and that is to be frank. If NATO makes mistakes, it should say so and publish all the evidence, including the video evidence. No matter which side of the argument one takes in these matters, none of us can have been entirely satisfied with the way in which NATO dealt with the events of last week. As this debate began, a press conference was being held at which more information was being put into the public domain. I doubt whether NATO will ever be blamed for delay, but it would certainly be blamed for disinformation, even if that arose innocently. NATO's values must demonstrably be different from those of the Milosevic regime.

On another point, I do not believe that the rubbishing of correspondents by unattributable briefing serves the cause. Mr. John Simpson is not a candidate for sainthood,

but it seems to me to betray a conspicuous lack of confidence in the justice of the cause to be so ultra-sensitive to his broadcasts from Belgrade. I firmly believe that we should let people make their own judgments. The Prime Minister rightly says that this is an issue about values. One of those values is freedom of expression. How shall we justify our determination to bring that freedom of information to Kosovo when we seem to fight shy of it ourselves?

It is possible to discern the pattern of the air campaign. With the tragic exceptions that have been mentioned, it has been largely successful in the avoidance of civilian casualties. It is clear that the pattern is to block the exits from Kosovo for the forces of the Milosevic regime. The purpose of the destruction of bridges and fuel dumps is obviously to cut lines of supply and the line of retreat. It will be a long way back to Belgrade for the paramilitary police and soldiers who have been such enthusiasts for ethnic cleansing; a long way back for those who have used rape to terrorise and humiliate women of the Albanian community; a long way back for those who may have done in Kosovo what they most assuredly did in Srebrenica. The Milosevic regime, it is clear, is ready to sacrifice its own foot soldiers for its survival.

I ask myself constantly, "Are we right to be there at all?" We are there out of painful necessity. We are there for values, not for money's-worth or resources—there are no natural resources to be plundered there. But we should ask ourselves that question constantly, because the course of action upon which we have embarked is a serious and solemn one; and, as has been said, we should be planning for what happens when the peace is won.

We should be planning for the strenuous effort that will be required to assist the long-term reconstruction, the economic revival and the political integration of the states of the former Yugoslavia into the mainstream of Europe, including Serbia and the Serbians, under a Government other than that of Mr. Milosevic. The Serbians, too, must be absorbed back into the mainstream of Europe. Rape, destruction, looting and brutality have become commonplace in Kosovo. The people of Kosovo are entitled to expect better and we should now be preparing to give them better.

I have never been comfortable with the expression "a just war". I have never been convinced that we do justice by waging war, but, rather, that sometimes it is necessary to wage war to allow the opportunity for justice. This is such an occasion. However, we delude ourselves if we think that military action can be conceived and implemented immaculately. With no irony, I say that military action is always a blunt weapon. The expression "a surgical strike" contains its own inherent contradiction. Sometimes, however, the blunt weapon is the last painful resort when diplomacy has failed and the defiance of civilised values is unabated. This is such an occasion.

When military force is contemplated or used, Governments cannot expect—nor are they entitled to expect—a blank cheque, not even from their own supporters. However, when the cause is a humanitarian one and when all other remedies have been tried and have failed, Governments such as the present Government are entitled to the support of the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that there is now a 10-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches until the end of the debate.

4.45 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Before the House of Commons commits troops in a democracy, it has a special responsibility to think about not only the terms of engagement, but why it is prepared to support such a move. Once that adventure has started, it is important that the House should give total support to those of our citizens who are involved. It is therefore, on occasions, extremely difficult for those of us who feel some unease about the way in which the situation is developing to express our fears without appearing to be undermining the efforts of those of our forces who are progressing this movement or of the Government whom we support. None the less, I feel that it would be wrong simply to ignore many of the implications of what is happening.

As a 20-year-old, I went with my parents to stay with Marshal Tito on the island of Brioni. It was soon after the break from Russia and Yugoslavia was expecting an invasion of the Russians. Tito was therefore extremely clear and forceful in his views about the needs of his nation and the difficulty of keeping the various nationalities and religions together. He had with him a couple of his generals—both of them Serbs—who explained to me how they had armed their troops during the war.

The generals said that they had no weapons and that the Germans had tanks. They explained that the Germans were precise and that, when they arrived on mountain roads, the Serbs laid a series of dinner plates in front of them. As the Germans could not believe that they were dinner plates, they opened the tops of their tanks and got out to inspect what was on the road. At that point, they were killed, and the Serbs then had tanks. It was a lesson that I took on board and understood.

At the beginning of this exercise, many of us feared that the Serbs' commitment and the way in which they normally fight for those things that are essential to them were perhaps underestimated. However, it is important now, given the appalling savagery that has been visited on Kosovo, for us to discuss the implications openly.

I believe strongly that the air attacks must go on and must be allowed to continue. I also believe that the House of Commons has a right to know what will happen if that campaign does not continue and is not successfully concluded. Unlike some other Members of Parliament, I will certainly find it difficult to support the commitment of ground troops if they not only have to fight their way into a province whose geography makes that kind of war difficult, but have to fight against tough, committed opponents. The House of Commons—which will have the responsibility of deciding not only the cost of such a war, but the cost in human lives—must think carefully before it allows that to go ahead.

I want to register my view briefly. I believe that, in the defence of democracy, we have a right to ensure that those who no longer maintain the standards of democracy are opposed in every way possible. However, I also believe

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

that, so far, we have not clearly quantified or clarified what we are asked to do. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary says that we are not at war. If we are not at war, I have some doubts about some of the things that are happening.

Nevertheless, I believe that the intentions of Her Majesty's Government are good and honourable. I would, however, say one thing to them: those of us who commit other women's sons to fight on our behalf must be very clear that we are not doing so in the wrong way, in the wrong terms and at the wrong time. I hope that we will be given the opportunity, if any such thing is even contemplated, to express the views of many of the people of the United Kingdom. Knowing the savagery and viciousness with which politics is frequently progressed in the Balkan states, people nevertheless want to know that we are not committing our people to a frightening long-term adventure that may not, in the final analysis, be in their interests.

4.52 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): In my judgment, there is no going back now, and there will be a substantial force of troops on the ground in Kosovo within a few weeks.

I do not think that there is any particular need for the House to have a collective nervous breakdown about the fact that there will be troops on the ground; what matters are the circumstances under which those troops are to be deployed. Whether the situation is benign or malign, it will—under whatever circumstances one can possibly foretell—certainly not be permissive. Therefore, British troops will be called on again to discharge a very hazardous operation.

As the Foreign Secretary said, British troops in Macedonia have done a remarkable job in building shelter for and looking after nearly 30,000 refugees. That extraordinary achievement on their part showed the humanity and sympathy for which the British fighting soldier is rightly highly regarded; indeed, it is one of the few bright beacons in this ghastly mess.

The House will wish to congratulate British and allied pilots, who have pressed home their attacks with great determination and skill in difficult conditions. Indeed, it has done so. May I, across the House, congratulate the Secretary of State for Defence and others on the way in which they have effectively used the Ministry of Defence press conferences, to try to get over the information about exactly what is happening? That has paid great dividends—the support for the campaign and these activities is running at a high level in this country, which is very important—and I hope that that good innovation will continue to be used.

I shall make just a few points in the brief time that I have and start by looking back. This whole event has come about because of what is, I am afraid, a tragic failure of international diplomacy. There is no doubt that the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues did their very best to prevent what was happening, but the fact that the Russians were not engaged earlier in a far greater way is a great strain. After all, they are the only people who could have delivered the Serbs.

Once the great rush of these events has passed, we need to consider carefully how to engage the Russians in a more meaningful way in the many areas of the world in which they have a vital role to play, for example, in the middle east. However, as the Foreign Secretary said, it is important that the political side is seen to march with the same vigour as the military side, and that as much is done to bring about a political conclusion as to bring about a military one.

Secondly, NATO will have learned what many people told it: that there was not the slightest possibility of Milosevic and the Serbs crumbling under sustained bombing. Indeed, the first 10 days of a pretty limited campaign have unleashed a wave of Serbian nationalism which will be extremely difficult to deal with. The beginning of the air campaign was conducted, for a number of reasons, at far too slow a tempo. Three weeks on, the central fact remains, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said, that the objective of the air campaign has not been achieved. Although much damage has been done to President Milosevic's military machine and much of his military infrastructure has been severely degraded, we have not yet managed to resolve the continuing humanitarian disaster by the use of air power.

Thirdly, it is clear that British forces are now under considerable pressure. The strategic defence review will have to be revisited, especially decisions taken about the reserve forces. I have just come back from America, where the Defence Secretary and I witnessed the launch of USS Winston Churchill. While I was there, all the main news stories in all the newspapers made it clear that President Clinton was about to sign an order calling up 30,000 reserves in order to be able to continue prosecuting this campaign. We shall be woefully short of people such as sappers, in particular, who will have to play a major role in the reconstruction of Kosovo, when that day eventually arrives. The whole House will be aware of the enormously distinguished role that the engineers played in Bosnia, and we shall be very short of people to do that work.

Fourthly, modern political leaders of a different generation pose a grave danger, for entirely understandable reasons—two biological reasons: they were born too late to experience world war two and have grown up mesmerised by technology—so impressed are they by their ability to kill from afar with almost no risk of retaliation against those firing the weapons. President Clinton has launched cruise missiles at Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq and Serbia in the past six months alone. The lesson to be learned is that limited actions get limited results.

May I ask the Defence Secretary what consideration has been given to the use of air drops of supplies to refugees still in Kosovo? Have the Government considered with their allies the establishment of safe havens, which were used to great effect in Iraq in 1991? After all, we have the punitive air power to support such an initiative. I should be grateful if the Defence Secretary would say what ideas have been taken into account in that regard.

Have the Government considered the use of airborne forces linked with commando forces? It is clear that there will have to be a major commitment of ground forces. That is the only way for NATO to impose its will.

4.59 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I welcome the support given by Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, which reciprocates the support given by the then Opposition to

the then Government on the Gulf and the Falklands. It is important that a consensus be sustained. I would welcome the opportunity of going into the Division Lobby to show how large the support is for the Government and Opposition line. Perhaps, at some stage, we will be given the opportunity to allow those who dissent to show how many they are. I await a speech from the Scottish National party on the matter. However, from the looks of it, I suspect that its members have gone back to their constituencies, preparing for opposition.

It is critical that the Government sustain the consensus. The Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence have made statements in the House, and there have been debates and briefings to both the Select Committee on Defence and the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs; there was a joint presentation today to the Committees. Any criticism that the Government have ducked presenting their case or eliciting the views of the House is unfair.

Lessons must be learned, although not by the Government. I recall the Defence Committee's undertaking an inquiry into the handling of the media during the Falklands war. The Government and the previous Government learned the lessons, but I suspect that the lessons have yet to be learned by NATO. A Victorian general's comment about the "newly invented curse" to armies—media interest—has a modern ring to it. NATO's problems—despite the sterling endeavours of civilian and military briefers, particularly Jamie Shea—show that it needs to learn some of the lessons that had to be learned by the Ministry of Defence on the presentation of its case.

Clearly, a war is being fought in the air and on the airwaves. In our 1983 report, the Defence Committee said:

"The Government were generally successful in the information war but not all adversaries will be overcome so convincingly."

That was prophetic. NATO has yet to learn the lesson that adequate staffing levels are required—not just to present information, but to indulge in the inevitable cause of information warfare. Are there the proper connections between the military and the civilians?

Last week was called a black week for NATO—not because we lost any aircraft or personnel, but because of the danger that we were not winning the information war. I am referring to the disaster of the civilians who were killed.

In the conclusion to our report of almost 20 years ago, the Defence Committee said:

"There can be sound military reasons for withholding the whole truth from the public domain, for using the media to put out 'misinformation', and for believing that particular rumours will redound to one's own side's advantage. These tactics, however, present risks to future credibility and should be used only after serious consideration."

NATO should not replace existing personnel at its information office, but supplement them with additional staff and ensure that the military and the civilians are singing, more or less, from the same song sheet.

Three weeks ago, the legitimacy of NATO's action was endorsed by the House. My enthusiasm and support for that legitimacy have been undiminished, despite criticisms of errors of judgment, an inability to prophesy, a lack of objectives and purpose and problems in executing decisions. There have been crises, but I am yet to be aware of any war where mistakes are not made. I do not wish to create any dissent, but those of us who sat through debates on the Falklands war can recall many errors; yet we won in the end, and public opinion rallied behind the Government. Ships, aircraft and lives were lost, and mistakes were made, but we must regard that as an inevitable consequence of war. When people vent their spleen on NATO or on Governments in the alliance, they must exercise a degree of realism in regard to the conduct of modern warfare. Warfare is not a football match broadcast on Sky Television, in the aftermath of which dissection and analysis are possible. It is not amenable to such analysis.

I believe that the House will continue to support NATO's policies, and will realise that, although Milosevic has played his cards with some skill and although we may have failed to appreciate his resolve, his fatal mistake is to underestimate our resolve. It is vital that we pursue our objectives with more rigour than we may have done hitherto.

When I was in the United States, it was said in some newspapers—unfairly, in my view—that this was a war prosecuted by the anti-Vietnam war generation who thought that no casualties should result and that people should feel guilty about killing even their opponents. Clearly, those who want to win a war must play tough. If the lesson of last week's public relations disaster is that risks should not be taken, I fear that we shall be bombing indefinitely—bombing empty woods, and dropping bombs in the middle of the Danube. If we want to be successful militarily, some difficult decisions will have to be made. Indeed, I suspect that they have already been made, and will be implemented.

There has been some debate about costs. It is perfectly legitimate to ask the Ministry of Defence what the costs are. The Secretary of State has said that, as of April, the cost

"is some £17 million; this does not include the costs of replenishing stock of ordnance expended."—[*Official Report*, 15 April 1999; Vol. 329, c. 324.]

Many, although not all, who have questioned the costs oppose the concept. Let us not use a cash register to work out the cost of every gallon of fuel used or every shell fired. The morality of the cause is such that we should not apply accountants' principles four weeks into the conflict. The time will come when we can engage in more detailed analysis. On Wednesday, the Defence Committee will be asking the senior finance officer about the methodology used in the calculations.

In fact, such is the justice of the cause that we are pursuing that it would have made no difference if the Secretary of State had given the figure as £170 million, £1,000,700,000, or even more. Let us not use the techniques of the accountant to undermine that cause. Should we be saying that our cause is just up to the point of £15 million, but should not be pursued beyond that?

Last week, the Defence Committee produced an excellent report on the Washington summit. There was a danger that the Kosovo issue would divert Heads of Government and those on the sidelines from the many things that needed to be done, but, fortuitously, the summit was well timed. I believe that those who attended it will support the decisions that have been made, and hope that NATO will emerge stronger. Let us make no mistake: if NATO cannot succeed in its objectives, one

[Mr. Bruce George]

wonders whether it will have a 51st anniversary. One wonders whether prospective members will wish not to be associated with an organisation that cannot defeat the warlordism in the Balkans. I only hope that the bombing strategy is successful. I believe—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

5.10 pm

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): I must start by saying that it is my opinion that this war is clumsy, wasteful and shambolic. I accept that the intentions of many of those who have signed up to it are honourable, but I can see neither clearly defined objectives nor any measurable progress in attaining them. Our Prime Minister appears to be making things up as he goes along.

It is indisputable that the situation of all civilians living in Yugoslavia, be they Albanian Kosovars or the inhabitants of Belgrade, has greatly worsened since the NATO operation started. I recognise that to state that leaves one open immediately to two charges. The first is that of wilfully condoning, or appeasing—as the Secretary of State for International Development said in answer to a question from me last week—the cruel and barbaric atrocities that have been perpetrated in parts of Yugoslavia. The second is that of wilfully, by implication, undermining the morale of our armed forces.

The first of those charges is, of course, absurd. General accusations that are neither justified nor applicable are no way to address the complexities, the centuries-old feuds and vendettas of Balkan tribesmen. As for the second, it is certainly an uncomfortable charge to lay at the door of any Conservative Member—not least a former Minister at the Ministry of Defence—that he has undermined the morale and effectiveness of our fighting men.

Personally, I hold the Secretary of State—I am sorry to see him leaving the Chamber; I hope that it is not in protest to what I am saying—in high regard. At every stage of his occupancy of this key post, he has acquitted himself with both firmness and decorum. During the crisis, he has always been listened to with attention.

I should remind the House that, unlike some of the players in this drama, I have never been a member of CND. Nor am I a draft-dodger. When the second world war was still on, I enlisted on the earliest day that it was physically possible—on my 17th birthday. Two of my sons, one of whom was decorated with the Gulf medal, have served in the Army. That gives me a strong entitlement to say that British service men are not recruited to kill non-combatants. Were they ever to do so, it is no more than our electorate would expect for us in this place to protest. Let me say that, although the camouflage of the NATO flag is used to divest and to spread responsibility for what has happened in recent days, I am entirely satisfied that the events are in no way attributable to the Royal Air Force.

The United States air force is another case altogether. Over many years, its record has been abominable, whether we are talking about Iranian air liners, British soldiers in personnel carriers, bridges, trains, factories or, apparently, refugee convoys in Yugoslavia. That air force is the worst instrument, the House might think, to let loose in a conflict where the distinction between combatant and non-combatant is often variable and elusive.

It will not be lost on the House that it is an order from the Pentagon that has prevented the somewhat muddled and inchoate NATO press office from showing the video of the attack on the refugee convoy. My heart sank when I heard that a contingent from the No. 10 press office was being sent to Brussels to help NATO to put a spin on things. One does not spin details of accident and bloodshed.

Ministers have told us that the war is about NATO's credibility. Few things are more likely to reduce its credibility—what is left of it—than sending the head of the No. 10 press office, whose attempts to bully the senior diplomatic editor of the BBC have done much damage to the cause of which he is an advocate, to process NATO communiques. Mr. Campbell would be better advised to stick to coaching the Prime Minister on how to respond. At present, that response consists simply of waving his hands about and repeating the name "Milosevic" at every possible opportunity. That is not like saying "boom and bust" all the time: it is a refusal to address the complexities or the alternatives, or even the cost of the operation and any notion of its equivalence in terms of humanitarian aid. That is a kind of dumbing down and is not worthy of the high office that he holds. I do not believe that his predecessors, Mr. Harold Wilson or Mr. James Callaghan—still less Mr. Attlee—would have ever responded in that unthinking and soundbite style.

The House should consider the interaction of national and military complexities and susceptibilities. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was howled down for reminding the House of the criminal element, terrorist conduct and many undesirable aspects of the KLA, but that has been confirmed by many, including in a long article in *The Wall Street Journal*. Mr. Jeremy Bowen, the BBC correspondent, was stopped by members of the KLA and all his money and equipment was stolen. The KLA are exactly the sort of people British service men should never fight alongside. It has been suggested that we should undertake to arm the KLA. Labour Members may recall the Contras, the Sandinistas and other groups who were armed by the CIA. That is the company that we will be in if we arm the KLA.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clark: If I give way, is it taken out of my time? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] In that case, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I will proceed. I wish to make two points that I hope will be answered when the Minister winds up. First, will the Foreign Secretary confirm that our post in Belgrade told him what the consequences of a NATO bombing attack were likely to be and that that was also reported to the Prime Minister's office? [HON. MEMBERS: "And the monitors."] My hon. Friends remind me to include the monitors and their reports in that question.

Secondly—this point should be answered by a Minister from the Ministry of Defence—there are significant gaps in the military information that should be disclosed. What were the separate recommendations of the Chief of the Defence Staff and against what remit were those made? What principles direct NATO targeting? Is it subject to a

ground or an airborne warning and communication system controller, as in the Gulf war, or is it on the much more perilous basis of targets of opportunity? Is it true, as reported in some of the newspapers that the RAF warned the US air force against attacking the refugee convoy and that in the past 24 hours a senior officer of the RAF Strike Command has resigned? Perhaps that could be confirmed this evening. Why is there so little information about the results, which must be known to the Yugoslavs, being disclosed to the public in the NATO countries? I put those points not from any position of prejudice concerning the atrocities that different elements in Yugoslavia perpetrate upon each other or from any lack of absolute confidence in our armed forces—although I could wish that they were being deployed in a more rewarding role—but because those are the sort of questions that a Back-Bench Member of Parliament is entitled, and should consider himself or herself obliged, to raise at a time like this.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Am I right in thinking that the Select Committee on Modernisation suggested that latitude should be allowed for interventions and they should not be included in the 10 minutes allowed for speeches?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The initial intervention is subtracted from the 10-minute limit, but the response is not.

5.19 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): If, two months ago, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had asked me to recommend a way to bolster support for Milosevic inside Yugoslavia, I think that I would have said, "Have you tried bombing Belgrade?" If, as a result, my right hon. Friend were to come to me and say, "Thanks very much, it worked. What would you recommend now?", my response would be that he might consider putting in ground troops.

I believe, however, that the use of ground troops in Yugoslavia would not be confined to Kosovo. The Serbs would continue to fight, and ground troops would have to be deployed in Serbia too. Despite what the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) said, the use of ground troops could lead to the occupation of Belgrade and other cities.

Of course, the deployment of ground troops might lead to the end of Milosevic. No hon. Member wants a person who involves himself in the brutal ethnic cleansing of Albanians to remain in power any longer than necessary. But we must not kid ourselves that there is a democratic alternative, as we know it, in Yugoslavia. In fact, Milosevic himself does not even have a majority in the Serbian Parliament. He depends on Vuk Draskovic, one of the deputy Prime Ministers, who the previous Tory Government believed to be such a rival to Milosevic that they invited him to London, at British taxpayers' expense, to do some sort of deal.

Yugoslavia's other deputy Prime Minister is Vojislav Seselj, whom I mentioned in a speech in October 1991. No one knew then who he was, and *Hansard* sent me a note asking how to spell his name. I knew who he was: he was the leader of the Radical party and, to be frank, an out-and-out fascist.

None of us has any time for the ethnic cleansing that has taken place, but the bombing is creating a spirit among the Serb population akin to that which we knew in the blitz. Unlike so many of the Ministers making decisions in this matter who have never heard a bomb drop in anger, I know what the British people felt during the battle of Britain and the blitz bombings of London and, especially, Liverpool. We concentrated our support on the figure of our leader, Winston Churchill. I come from a solid Labour family. Every night, when Churchill spoke on the radio, my father would say, "Hush. We must now listen to what Mr. Churchill has to say."

As the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) rightly said, we must ask whether the situation is better than it was before 24 March, when the air raids began. The answer is, patently, no. Of course the situation is not better: it is worse. When a policy is designed, and before it is implemented, the question should always be, "Will this course of action make things better or worse for people?" The air raids have made it worse, and the use of ground troops will make it worse still.

We hear a lot of stories about mass graves. All those guilty of murdering people and putting their bodies in mass graves must be brought to account. I have a specific question for the Government, the answer to which is always refused. If we are against ethnic cleansing, as I am, should we not be against all ethnic cleansing? We are, rightly, going to attack Milosevic over what is happening in Kosovo, but what about Franjo Tudjman in Croatia, where 280,000 Serbs have been driven brutally out of Krajina? Not a finger has been raised by the NATO powers about that.

Mr. Robathan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wareing: I would love to, but I do not think that I would get injury time.

We must also be careful about the propaganda from our own side. I remember, at the time of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, that the New York firm of Hill and Dowson put out a story that Iraqi soldiers were throwing babies out of incubators. We now know that the story was absolutely incorrect: it never happened. My mother told me about a rumour in the first world war that the Germans put Belgian babies on their bayonets.

Let us be very careful and not indulge in propaganda that is obviously nonsense. To tell the people of Pristina that they bombed themselves—that it was not the RAF or the Americans—is like telling the people of Coventry that they were bombed not by the Luftwaffe but by the RAF.

For God's sake let us reconvene the conference and involve Russia, because Russia holds the key and must not be ignored. The parliamentary elections in December could be a disaster for the west if we push Russia to one side. Let us also bring in Croatia. Let Franjo Tudjman, as well as Milosevic, answer for his crimes.

I hope that the Government will begin to listen and will not be taken in by opinion polls. If a disastrous ground war is conducted the opinion polls will not be so easy on the Government as they are now.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is not it a grave discourtesy to the House that, at not yet 5.30, there is no Cabinet Minister here to listen to our deliberations?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Who decides to sit on the Front Benches on either side is not a matter for the Chair.

5.26 pm

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): The terrible atrocities in Kosovo can be explained, but in no way excused, by the bloodstained history of the region, stretching back over centuries. The answer that the Secretary of State for Defence has twice given me in the House, that something must be done and that we cannot do nothing, is not satisfactory. Foreign policy and the making of war must be judged by results and not by intentions, however admirable those might be.

It has been obvious from the start that the Government's plans have not been thought through. They have certainly not saved the Kosovo Albanians. In terms of achieving its strategic and political objectives, this Balkan air war is likely to go down in history as the most incompetent operation in which Britain has been involved since the Crimea, making the planners of Gallipoli and Suez look like professionals.

One recalls Disraeli's comment on a similar Balkan situation in 1876. He said:

"Mr. Gladstone and his friends will avenge the Bulgarian atrocities by the butchery of the world."

Without wiser statesmanship, that is where we may be headed.

The French, fortunately, are keeping in close touch with the Russians. It would be folly to disregard President Yeltsin's warning not to push Russia too far. He is a moderate in this context. One of the consequences of the present policy will be to reverse the move away from the cold war, with incalculable consequences that may in time far outweigh all other considerations for our own people.

The authors of this folly are increasingly frightened of informed criticism as their policy is seen blatantly to fail. Mr. John Simpson is denounced as a Serb dupe. Ministers who were flaunting CND badges when there was a real threat to Britain now dismiss General Sir Peter de la Billière and General Sir Michael Rose as armchair journalists. One does not need an armchair to see where the Government's policy has gone so tragically wrong; a nursery stool will do.

When, as an 18-year-old national service man, I was ordered to officer training school, the first War Office pamphlet that we were given started with the following four paragraphs:

"1. Identify an achievable objective.

2. Plan how to reach it.

3. Do not move until you have decided how to deal with the likely problems that may arise.

4. Give no advance indication of your intentions."

That War Office pamphlet must now be out of print because it clearly was not shown to the Prime Minister or his advisers before he announced an air bombardment of Serbia while firmly ruling out any aggressive use of land forces to support it. A more fatuous statement of war policy could hardly be imagined, as I pointed out from my nursery stool as forcefully as I could when the Prime Minister first made it on 23 March, the day before the bombing began.

There has been confusion from the start about the objective. Originally, and for the first few days, the declared objective was to impose the Rambouillet accord on Serbia. There never was an agreement and the accord is now a dead letter. The local Serb population in Kosovo would react to any NATO occupying force, whether it arrived in permissive or aggressive form, just as they treated the Nazi SS. Neither Milosevic nor Tito before him taught the Serbs how to fight a guerrilla war; it is bred in the bone.

Within days, the declared NATO objective was changed. The new objective was to prevent a humanitarian disaster. That has totally failed, as even the American NATO commander in chief, General Clark, has now publicly admitted that air power alone cannot stop paramilitary forces on the ground committing atrocities. One might have thought that that would have been obvious in advance, but it seems to have come as a surprise to our Ministers and their military advisers, as have the facts that the Balkans at this time of year has cloudy weather and that the Serbs are an indomitable race.

To what extent the sending of troops to Macedonia precipitated the Serb decision to drive the Albanians out of Kosovo we must now leave to the historians, but it is certain that the bombing has in no way prevented or ameliorated the appalling suffering of the refugees, and has probably made it worse, and has positively accentuated the intensity and brutality of the so-called ethnic cleansing.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Peter Tapsell: No, I cannot because of the maddening time rule. It ruins all debate, but one must press on.

The Prime Minister likes striking moral poses. I do not question his sincerity, but the practical effect of his policies on ordinary people is what he must be judged by. So far, his policy has been a disastrous failure. He has united the whole Serb nation behind Milosevic and not saved the life or home of a single Albanian refugee. We are now told, as though we did not anticipate it, to prepare for a long war. Within a few weeks, there will be precious few Albanians left in Kosovo and we may be sure that, despite the fine words, most of them will never go back.

There is now even lunatic talk of using Hungary as a possible base for a ground invasion of Serbia, despite the many ethnic Hungarians who live in Serbia and the fury that it would arouse in Russia. We seem to be governed by Ministers who think that foreign policy should be determined by opinion polls, focus groups and television cameras. What is happening in Sierra Leone, about whose atrocities the Foreign Secretary was recently so excited? Is it all sweetness and joy in Freetown now or have the cameras just moved elsewhere?

Despite repeated pledges, repeated again by the Prime Minister over the weekend, that there will be no armed invasion of Kosovo or Serbia against hostile military resistance, all the signs are that preparations are being made to undertake just such an invasion by ground troops. Indeed, although I am wholly opposed to such a course of action, on 23 March, before the bombing started, I pointed out to the Prime Minister, in the clearest terms, that his announced strategy made no sense unless it was going to culminate in the use of ground forces on a large scale and that that would entail heavy casualties.

If the Prime Minister did not understand the truth of that, he is guilty of gross incompetence. If he did understand it, but wished at that stage to conceal the reality of his policy from the people of this country, by

using the weasel words of which I accused him, then shameful concealment must be added to the charge of gross misjudgment.

On my first visit to Vietnam during the Vietnam war, there were 300 Americans there in civilian clothing. On my third visit, there were 500,000 American troops in uniform, and General Westmoreland told me that, during the Tet offensive, they had dropped on the Vietcong a higher weight of high explosives than had been dropped on Germany, from all sources, during the whole second world war and that it would be only a matter of months before the Vietcong capitulated. That should be borne in mind before we go any further down that road.

5.36 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I am not an uncritical supporter of this war. There are many questions that need to be asked and answered, although perhaps this is not the time to ask some of them. However, why did not those who planned this war—and it is a war, I cannot understand the use of any other word; if one bombs and fights people, then it must be a war—plan for the humanitarian problems that have been caused as a result?

During the Easter recess, like many people, I felt wholly frustrated as I saw the war unfold. I saw the result for the 145,000 people who were kept in no man's land in the most atrocious weather, during that period when they were not allowed to cross into Macedonia. Like many people, I wanted Parliament to be recalled because we do have views to express and these occasions produce some of the best debates in the House; people feel strongly about issues of life and death.

I have just spent three days in Macedonia. I went to Skopje on a Russian plane with a Russian crew, with a load of relief organised by Express Newspapers. Once again, that showed the generosity of the British people towards the refugees. I support those who have said how much the NATO troops are appreciated. Some of the camps that I visited had been set up by NATO; those were the best camps and one could see that the soldiers had built up a strong rapport both with adults and children. We delivered some footballs and saw the joy of the children as they played with them, and I am sure that the British public would like to know that their relief—their support and generosity—is much appreciated.

I toured the camps with representatives of the United Nations Children's Fund—UNICEF—and pay tribute to all the aid workers who do such a superb job. The camps were not the worst refugee camps that I have ever seen; unfortunately, I feel that I have seen too many refugees all over the world. However, we heard many individual stories and, because the people of Kosovo are European, they were the stories of a fairly sophisticated population. We heard about people who ran discos or owned three shops, who were university professors or intellectuals and who are now inside those camps surrounded by wire, where they feel trapped.

We heard the desperation of people who do not know where their 90-year-old mother is because they were separated on the border. We heard that when the soldiers came to Pristina and gave the population three minutes to get out of their houses, a small, 12-year-old boy picked up a baby left alone on the street as the soldiers came. As he carried the baby in his arms, he was beaten by Serbian soldiers and had to drop the baby and run for his life. His family have not seen that boy since.

I saw the desperation of people who were separated at the border—a man who had been separated from his wife because she was ill, but who did not know what had happened to her after she was taken away to a rest centre; for three days, he had not known where she was. It sounds ridiculous, but the best thing to do at the moment would be to set up some sort of communication centres inside the camps, so that people had access to telephones. People came to us with pathetic scraps of paper with two telephone numbers written on them; they wanted to contact people in Germany, Macedonia, Albania or Montenegro, but could not get to a telephone. Outside the Red Cross tents were long queues of people who were trying to link up with families from whom they had been separated. All those things are brought home to anyone who visits the camps.

Help is slowly beginning to get to the children. UNICEF has brought desks and chairs to some of the camps and teachers are helping to set up classes. They gave children sheets of paper and crayons and told them to draw whatever they wanted; of course, they all drew pictures of war. They drew maps of Kosovo with barbed wire around it, or a peace dove flying out of it; they drew pictures of guns pointing at people, soldiers with tanks, and houses on fire. I heard people describe how they stood and watched their house going up in flames and how they could not get to members of their family trapped inside—for example, one 12-year-old girl was unable to escape when her house was set on fire.

All those stories are tragic, which is why I appeal to our Government to do something more for the refugees. People told me that they had been asked to which countries they wanted to go, and I looked at the list of countries and saw that Germany, Iceland, Israel, Norway, Poland, Turkey and Switzerland have all taken refugees. Yet I heard my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary say today that we will take 20 refugees, if there is medical need. That is not good enough. People told me that their first choice would have been the United Kingdom, but one man told me, "You don't want us, so I put down Sweden instead." We should be more generous towards the refugees.

Macedonia has been criticised, but as one Macedonian MP told me in Brussels the week before I went, the Macedonians feel extremely angry about that. Macedonia, with a population of only 2.2 million, has taken nearly 200,000 refugees, which is the equivalent of sending 33 million refugees to the United States. To criticise the Macedonians is unfair, because they too have an ethnic balance to maintain. They simply cannot cope with the current situation, and I was not surprised when, the day I left, the Macedonians said that they could not take any more refugees.

When I reached the border, I saw a train load of 2,500 refugees arrive in the same area as the 145,000 refugees who had arrived over Easter; I stood there for two hours, but not one refugee came across the border. Two more trains were expected that day. I spoke to the OSCE major-general in charge of operations, who said, "I don't know how they're going to cope. This is going to be a real challenge to the system." In those circumstances, we should be more generous in offering refugees an opportunity to come to Britain if they want to.

With one exception, every refugee I spoke to said, "I want to go back to Kosovo—that's my home, it's the land of my fathers and I want to go back there." The

[Ann Clwyd]

refugees will not return to their homes unless they are sure that they will be safe. It is ludicrous to suggest that the refugees will return home quickly, because they will not.

In 1991, I saw the Kurds cross the border into Iran in the face of Iraqi attacks. Some of those Kurds are still in refugee camps on the Iranian border. They have never returned home. Some of them are still living in temporary structures because their houses have not been rebuilt. The scale of the destruction in Kosovo is similar to that in northern Iraq where Saddam Hussein destroyed hundreds of villages, which have not been rebuilt. The reality is that many Kosovan refugees will not return home for years and, if they do, they will live in temporary structures.

I have spoken only once this year about this issue in the House. On 14 January, I said that ground troops should be sent in sooner rather than later. My view has not diminished, but strengthened. Until ground troops go in, Kosovo will continue to burn and Kosovan refugees will continue to flood over borders.

5.46 pm

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): I wish to speak, so far as possible, from personal experience. This debate is being held in the shadow of great and tragic events and we must not forget that, as we speak, Kosovo Albanians are being murdered. They are being executed and buried in mass graves and their homes are being burned and looted. The survivors are being ejected forcibly from the territory in which they have lived for many generations.

It is time for clarity. We need clarity about what has or has not been achieved so far. It was hoped that the bombing campaign would somehow draw support away from President Milosevic. It has not done so. The people rallying to him now are those who were close to bringing him down in the mass street demonstrations of two winters ago. I know because I was there. It was hoped also that the bombing would alleviate the plight of the Albanians, but it has done nothing of the sort. I was in Kosovo six days before the bombing started and, in that week, 15,000 Albanians were driven from their homes. In the week after the bombing began, that number rose to 300,000.

We must be clear about the limitations of unsupported air power. In the House last week, I asked the Prime Minister to give me one example from any time or place when unsupported air power achieved a decisive military result. He could not do so because there is no such example. On that occasion, I quoted a serving senior military officer who said:

"Circumstances on the ground can be changed only by boots on the ground."—[*Official Report*, 13 April 1999; Vol. 329, c. 27.]

That view remains true. I understand why the generals are advising Ministers that, for one reason or another—successive defence cuts, for example—we do not have sufficient troops for a ground operation. However, I cannot imagine them advising Ministers that air power alone would do it.

We need clarity about the information campaign—the propaganda war—because a modern war must be fought and won twice over: not only on the field of battle but on the air waves of the world. I deeply regret the fact that British reporters working under severe difficulties in Belgrade—not only Mr. Simpson, but he is the most conspicuous example—have been attacked. They are having enough trouble being vilified and abused on the streets without facing sniper fire from Downing street.

We need clarity also about targeting. If we target a bridge, it is a civilian as well as a military target. If we target a Government building in a built-up area, that is a civilian as well as a military target. If we target roads where civilian and military columns may be mixed together or where Serbian armour may be obscenely protected by human shields, they are civilian as well as military targets. These are very difficult times, and one of the many arguments for the use of ground troops is that they can distinguish between a tractor and a tank.

It is time for clarity about the history of this situation. The House should understand that the Serbs live their history like no other people on earth, except perhaps the Jewish people. Kosovo field is their Masada: it is the place where they will fight and die if they have to. They have mythologised it. Kosovo affects the way in which they operate. It is as if we determined our policy by believing every word of the Arthurian legend. For example, one reason why Milosevic compromised on the future of the Bosnian Serbs was that in 1389, on the field of Kosovo, the then Bosnian Serb king, Vuk Brankovic, was the first to leave the battlefield, and the Serbs have blamed him for the defeat ever since.

An example from recent history is that during the second world war, whenever the Serbs killed a single German, the Germans would kill 100 Serbian civilians—but that did not deter the Serbs, and the present bombardment will not deter them.

We need clarity about the nature of modern warfare. All hon. Members know more about politics than I do, but I can claim to know a little about warfare. Modern warfare, especially as practised by the peoples of the Balkans, makes no distinction whatever between soldiers and civilians, and it violates the Geneva conventions every day. It is not cost-free. We have lived in recent years in an age of illusion, thinking that a military operation can be a cost-free way to settle differences. That view has been reinforced by the relatively easy victory of the Allies in the Gulf war and by the incredibly light British casualties in Bosnia.

Our view has been further reinforced by the actions of the television companies in self-censoring their pictures of war—I have been an accomplice in that—so that people do not understand the realities of war. That happened in Bosnia. We were invited to show the outgoing ordnance but not what happened at the other end: the maiming, the killing and the irredeemable loss of young lives, which is what warfare is about. We have to understand that if we are to proceed further with this course of action, the operation will not be cost-free.

I believe that we should proceed further and that we have no alternative but to do so. From the start of the crisis, our only alternatives were to stay completely out of the situation on the basis that we were not willing to risk casualties, or to become completely involved and decide, on moral grounds, to risk casualties.

I shared a television studio with the Minister for the Armed Forces last week, and I was interested to hear him remark that the Government were doing more than some had urged them to do and less than others had urged. It is as if the Government were piloting a great ship through a

large waterway with a channel on either side and a great rock in the middle. They will not take the left-hand channel because of the voices urging them to take the right-hand channel and vice versa, so they head straight for the rock.

We must take a clear course, which is morally defined because it will tell us what kind of people we are. Are we people who will sit back, wring our hands, bomb from afar and let the genocide happen? Or are we people who care enough to take risks that will not only bring peace to the Balkans in the long run but define the security structures that we shall have for our children and grandchildren well into the 21st century?

This is a question of how we react to genocide. It takes us back not only to Srebenica but to the second world war. I assure the House that genocide requires not only the brutality and hatred that make it happen but the indifference that lets it happen. Let not that indifference be ours.

5.53 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): If ever there were a case that justified the House of Commons, it is today's debate. There is disagreement—I shall try to vote against the war tonight—so we should be clear about what we agree on.

There are no apologists for Milosevic in the House. Nobody here could conceive of endorsing, supporting or accepting ethnic cleansing. There are people who are concerned about not only the refugees in Kosovo but the 300,000 Serb refugees from Krajina, who are now being bombed in their refuge in Yugoslavia, and the Serbs who have left Kosovo because of the Kosovo Liberation Army. The Foreign Secretary told us in January that the KLA had killed more Serbs than the Serbs had Albanians.

The argument is not even about force. I favour the use of force, but not by NATO. I want to be specific and clear about that. As I have said in earlier debates, I am of a generation for whom the United Nations charter was the great hope of the world. The charter said clearly that force could be used but only by the Security Council. When NATO was formed, article 1 of its constitution—I looked it up to remind myself of its words—said that its members

"shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force . . . in any . . . manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."

NATO is breaking its own constitution. I shall turn in a moment to what hope NATO might have of achieving anything. The House is, if I may say so, ill informed by the media and the Government.

The annex of the Rambouillet agreement says that

"NATO personnel would be permitted to enter into Yugoslavia from any border—Bosnia, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, with machinery, arms ammunition and men. Furthermore they have to be given all assistance from the military and civilian authorities throughout Yugoslavia, and would be able to leave their arms in Yugoslav Army depots, or where they so choose."

That was not an agreement; it was an ultimatum. It said to the Serbs, "If you don't accept this, we will bomb you."

What was the Serb response? We are so ill informed that I only discovered it in an article from *The New York Times* of 8 April, which somebody sent me in one of the thousands of letters that I have received. In that article, Steven Erlanger from Belgrade said:

"Just before the bombing the Serbian parliament rejected NATO troops in Kosovo . . . it also supported the idea of a United Nations force to monitor a political settlement there".

The argument is about whether the answer is NATO troops or an international force.

We all speak from experience. I was a Member of the House at the time of the Suez crisis. The only other Member who can say the same, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), was then the Government Chief Whip. I was advising Hugh Gaitskell, who did not, as Leader of the Opposition, have a television set. He came to my house to watch Eden's broadcast. I sat with Gaitskell at his house in Hampstead for the whole of Sunday 4 November 1956 and helped him, as a young Member would help a party leader, with his broadcast about Suez. He said:

"There is no doubt about it that the large-scale invasion of Egypt was an act of aggression . . . We should have been acting on behalf of the United Nations with their full authority . . . It is not a police action; there is no law behind it. We have taken the law into our own hands. What are the consequences? We have violated the Charter of the United Nations. In doing so we have betrayed all that Great Britain has stood for in world affairs."

The sound and other technicians were listening, riveted, to that broadcast. That represented my commitment, which is that force can be used only the UN.

We are facing a long war; there is no doubt about that. The war has already spread to Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, and for all I know, it will spread beyond that. I do not know what the Russians will do. I am told that earlier this afternoon, Yeltsin said that Russia would not allow Yugoslavia to be defeated. We cannot rely on Yeltsin—he may be seeking a foreign crisis to get him off a hook, but so may President Clinton.

How will the situation end? With ground troops? The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), who speaks from great media experience of war, is right—bombing will not work. Troops will therefore be sent in, but if we do that, will it be an occupation, a partition or a protectorate? How will the refugees return? The Opposition properly asked those questions. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) exercised his responsibility as a party spokesman to ask questions that simply have not been answered. Who will pay for the villages to be rebuilt? Those questions are simply brushed aside.

Who wants the war? President Clinton wants the war because he runs NATO. The Prime Minister is continually repeating his commitment to the war. We see pictures of him in the cockpit of aircraft which make clear his intent. NATO wants the war because it will make it credible. Many times I have heard people say, "NATO must be credible," and I realise that the war is not so much about the refugees as about NATO's credibility. The KLA wants the war because we are arming it. We joined in a civil war, and armed the KLA. I will not say that the arms trade wants a war, but there is big business to be made from replacing the armour that has been used.

As for the media, there are daily press conferences. I personally think that it is an insult to our intelligence to personalise all conflicts as if, somehow, shooting Saddam Hussein and Milosevic would return peace to the middle east and the Balkans. What folly to engage in such schoolboy politics. There are complex historical conditions. If Milosevic were shot, somebody else would come along who is just the same, because the Serbs are united. The history is ignored.

[Mr. Tony Benn]

The Serbs are demonised. There is demonisation of the enemy in war; we must make out that every Serb is a criminal and it is therefore our duty to kill him. The Serbs are people; people know that they may not like their own Government. The hon. Member for Tatton said that many Serbs want to get rid of Milosevic, yet they are all demonised.

Critics are denounced as appeasers—I have heard that before. I was accused by Bernard Braine, whom I dearly love, of being "Nasser's little lackey" during Suez. He apologised so many times afterwards that I felt quite sorry for him. Critics were always accused of being an agent of the Kremlin, a supporter of the IRA, in favour of Adolf Hitler. That is no way in which to conduct a conflict of this kind.

The peace movement is of course ignored. Last Sunday week, there were 10,000 people in Trafalgar square, but *The Guardian* did not even mention it because it had to report on the 5,000 people who were protesting in Kuala Lumpur at the arrest of Anwar Ibrahim.

What is the role of Parliament in this war? By chance—it was in the local paper—I know that two of my constituents are soldiers who may be sent to war. Are we just to be observers? Could Jamie Shea have made today's speeches? As far as we are concerned, he could just as well have done so. We are being told by the Government's two chief press officers what is being done, and then told that all parties agree. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) was fair in saying that he shared my view about the role of Parliament.

There is to be no vote tonight. My Whip has told me, on this great historic occasion, "Your attendance is requested"—with one line under it. Is it not important to the Government to indicate their support? When all we can do is vote on the closure motion, I do not think that many will vote with us—they probably will not—but at least others will be given an opportunity to abstain. I am not so sure whether the Government do not want a vote because, although they might not yet find many against them, many, even from the Conservative party, might not want to go into the Lobby.

We are responsible people. Being a Member of Parliament is a great honour, but it carries responsibility: the responsibility for deciding whether one agrees with the Government of the day. This is an ill thought out policy. It is not legal in character; it is not moral in its implication. I do not make much of the convoy because war is bloody and indiscriminate—it always has been and always will be. Hon. Members who want to be spectators of their fate ought to consider very seriously whether even by abstention, and certainly by not voting, they are assenting to a policy which, in my serious judgment, will not succeed, but which will inflict terrible damage on the Balkans with which we shall have to live for many years to come.

6.3 pm

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): I begin with two primary points that set out my party's position. First, we express to the service men and women who are taking part in this action our full support and our good wishes for their security and safety.

Secondly, I am sure that, regardless of individual or party views of the bombing strategy in the Balkans, all hon. Members share the same deep concern for the displaced and terrorised Albanian population of Kosovo. Their tragedy is played out nightly in front of us, but their suffering can only be imagined as we hear of the appalling atrocities and inhumanity being wreaked by a Serbian army, which must be called to account before the bar of international opinion, as its commanders must before the international court. It is clear beyond any doubt, beyond any debate, that Milosevic and his regime are responsible for this slur on our humanity.

As we debate the gravest humanitarian catastrophe to befall our continent since the second world war, the number of expelled civilians continues to grow. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UN monitors in the region this morning estimated that the total number of refugees is 365,000 in Albania and 132,500 in Macedonia. An additional 73,500 Kosovars have been displaced to Montenegro. That is indeed appalling. We must use all the resources at our disposal to help those in extremity today, and we must find a way in which to make certain that the ordinary Albanian Kosovar population will return in peace to their homes. In doing so, we should not underestimate the scale of the challenge of persuading terrified Kosovars to return to their homes. At least one Labour Member has made that point clearly.

The bombing campaign is now the central challenge to us all in seeking a just and effective solution to the Kosovo crisis. The issue is whether the stated aims of the NATO campaign have been achieved, or can be achieved. I submit that they have not. Indeed, there are no signs of an ability to do so. The debate on ground forces, which has dominated many speeches so far, shows that, as does the increasing information from inside NATO, where grave concerns are being expressed.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swinney: I have only 10 minutes and I wish to make my comments.

This is not a party political issue. The issue is being debated in houses and workplaces throughout the country. It is a matter for the views and consciences of those in all parts of the political spectrum. Concerns about the current NATO strategy that have been expressed by members of my party have not been voiced in isolation. Some of the strongest remarks have been made by serving and former members of the military, who know that this campaign is not working and cannot work.

That view is informed by the gradual publication of the real views of military planners, politicians and decision makers around the world. Last week, the chairman of the United States joint chiefs of staff gave evidence to the Senate armed services committee. General Henry Shelton told Committee members that the air war might fail to achieve the prime objective of compelling Milosevic to withdraw from Kosovo. He was expressing a view that was given to Madeleine Albright before the campaign started, yet she and her advisers persisted in the belief that 24 or 48 hours of bombing would conclude the matter. The evidence of four weeks shows that judgment to have been unsubstantiated.

General Shelton's view is amplified by the former commander of United Nations forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina, General Sir Michael Rose. Writing in one of the Sunday newspapers this weekend, he said:

"air-power is a blunt weapon, wholly inappropriate for use by itself in this form of conflict".

He went on to suggest that air power cannot win and that, as a full military campaign seems impossible to organise on any reasonable time scale and would in any case simply escalate international tension, some diplomatic solution needs to be found.

It strikes me that, when an individual of the military experience and calibre of Sir Michael Rose makes such an assessment, it should be listened to. The Government may of course choose to express repugnance at such comments, as they did at earlier interventions along similar lines. It would be wise, even now, for better sense to prevail.

The concerns of military experts such as Sir Michael are also shared by many in the House. Today, I read with interest—I also listened with care to his speech—the comments of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), who wrote:

"We are continuing to bomb as if bombing alone would produce the result we wish. But it has not and it will not."

That view is also taken by many outside the House—distinguished churchmen, innumerable journalists and military experts—and was taken from the beginning by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) in his broadcast three weeks ago.

Mr. Hood: Is the hon. Gentleman reaffirming the Scottish National party's official policy that it is against the action that has been taken in Kosovo? Is he reaffirming his leader's view?

Mr. Swinney: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my comments, he would know that that is abundantly clear. There is a basic right in a democracy to be free to express views sincerely held and well argued, and to show mutual respect for divergent views. That mutual respect is not always shown in this House, as we have seen today.

The key issue now is what comes next in this conflict. I draw hon. Members' attention to today's edition of *The New York Times*. Under the headline,

"U.S. is asking NATO for Sea Blockade of Yugoslavia's Oil",

one of America's most respected newspapers reports on the need to apply full sanctions to Yugoslavia. Incredibly, oil is still being delivered to the former Yugoslavia. There is incredulity in some parts of NATO that, while oil refineries and storage tanks are being bombed, oil is still being bought by a war machine that could be slowed and stopped by the shortage of that one commodity.

Apparently, the oil blockade has not been implemented owing to doubts about its legality. It would, say some, require a UN resolution. Is it conceivable that there can be a bombing campaign for almost four weeks without UN sanction, yet an oil blockade cannot be implemented for lack of one? It is beyond belief.

I believe, my party believes and many people in this country and overseas believe that the bombing campaign has failed in its objectives. Now is the time for new thinking—for moving forward to find solutions that do not further escalate the situation.

Now is the time to make the Russians part of the solution, not part of the problem. Now is the time to put every ounce of effort into humanitarian aid—at least as much as the $2 billion that has rained down from the sky on the poor country of Kosovo. And now is the time to start working out the ways in which we can help the very people for whom, in the name of peace, we may have created a desert in their own country.

6.10 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The House is overwhelmingly behind the Government, but that has not been evident from the series of speeches that we have just heard. That is because this is a democratic House, because there are many uncertainties, and because it is very proper for colleagues in our democratic assembly to make the sober and sobering speeches that they have made. Four weeks into the campaign, the picture remains very gloomy. Progress is not as great as we had hoped, and there is frustration about that, in the absence of clear evidence that the war aims with which we set out are being achieved.

There is a new wave of atrocities, and new evidence that many hundreds of thousands of people in Kosovo are now in the hills, close to starvation. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence say what air drops are being contemplated to alleviate the plight of those people in the hills? The war is escalating. We hear that United States reservists are being called to the front.

There is a risk of political collapse throughout the Balkans, so the stakes are very high. This conflict is very different from the Falklands conflict, in which the aim was clear—to get the Argentines out of those islands. It is very different from the Iraq conflict in 1990-91, in which the aim was clear—to force Iraq to leave Kuwait. In the Balkans, the aims must necessarily be far muddier.

It was very proper for the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), in a very good speech, to ask for clarity on several aspects—for example, concerning the future constitutional status of Kosovo. We have moved on from Rambouillet, which is dead in many respects. We now talk about some international status, but there is no clear precedent for that. We know about the position in Namibia, in Cambodia and in eastern Slavonia, but each differs from that in the Balkans. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary airily talks about a mixture of international bodies. Surely there should be a United Nations trusteeship, with others helping as appropriate.

There is uncertainty as to how we regard President Milosevic. Is he—as President Clinton now apparently says—to be regarded as a war criminal, who must be hounded out of office, or is he a possible negotiating partner in the endgame in Kosovo? As colleagues have properly said, there are other potential war criminals who are leaders in Balkan states.

What about the role of ground troops? Is it plausible that, at some time, President Milosevic will run up a white flag and say, "I surrender," without any ground forces entering his territory? There would need to be a case for troops to enter in an aggressive posture, rather than by consent. If we insist that ground troops will not enter unless by consent, we must scale down our war aims and realign those aims to the resources that we are prepared to deploy.

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

It is important for us to point out all the complexities from our armchairs—from the comfort of the Chamber—but the Government had to take decisions, and act decisively. This is a conflict which NATO—whose 50th anniversary is this week—dare not lose, and ultimately cannot lose, because it has vast resources at its disposal, whereas the Serbs have limited resources, rapidly depleted, at their disposal. It is a conflict that Milosevic must not win, because of the precedent that that would set for others who might also be intent on ethnic cleansing in that highly fragile region.

In the immediate future, therefore, we must maintain the military pressure and build our available forces in theatre. We must give President Milosevic a clear signal that we will go as far as is necessary—that we are in earnest, not bluffing. NATO unity is precious, and it is vital that that message be passed to President Milosevic, so that he is in absolutely no doubt.

We must build up our military capacity incrementally. It is true that United Kingdom forces are now in Macedonia, but there are only 14 Chieftain tanks there. That is absurd if we wish to show credibly that we have the will, if we need to, to enter with ground forces. We must give a signal to President Milosevic of greater co-operation with the KLA—at least in terms of intelligence and non-lethal co-operation—and we must show a commitment to the International War Crimes Tribunal, by offering to give it greater help in the form of personnel and resources. By acting in all those ways, we shall give a clear signal.

However, we must adopt a two-track approach—both military and political. We should pursue the military strategy energetically, but we must be ready, in the fairly near future, to rebalance the political and military strategy. That means increasingly consulting Russia as a partner and seeking to work with the United Nations, ever to be ready to accept an outcome that may be less than total victory, if the broad objectives that we seek can be achieved—such as that of avoiding a wider Balkans war.

We should leave the door open for compromise, and avoid that absolutist language which, [illegible] used by some retired US generals and even Pres[illegible]linton. To make an eventual negotiated settlement possible, we should avoid using words such as holocaust and genocide.

If possible, we should avoid making Serbia a wasteland, ruined and humiliated. We should think of the example of Germany in 1918, and the ghost that haunted Europe later. We should remember the complexities of the history of the Balkans—the fault line of Europe. A multi-ethnic empire is unravelling, with all the consequences that might flow from that. We should remember that, before Racak, the KLA had killed more civilians than the Serbs—and there is the memory of Krajina.

However, compromise must come from strength, not from weakness. It may include keeping an open mind about the nature of the military—yes, military—force that will have to enter Kosovo to ensure that the refugees may return in safety and stability. The OSCE and NATO may play a part, but they will have to work very closely indeed with Russia—and, as far as possible, do so under the umbrella of the United Nations. Compromise would not rule out partition if greater goals could thereby be achieved. Remember that the boundaries in that area are often very ill-defined, as we saw in Bosnia.

Mistakes have been made. One was to ignore the warning on the road sign which read—like those that we see in London and elsewhere—"Do not enter box unless your exit is clear." In my judgment, intervention was necessary, however. That cannot be over-emphasised.

Now NATO must look long, and look at the big picture. The big picture is in part humanitarian—the need to help that great sea and mass of suffering people who have been forced out as a result of ethnic cleansing, and who were in the process of being forced out before bombing started. Let us not forget that. However, politically, we must signal to Milosevic that we are prepared for the long haul if necessary, and that we are prepared to enter Kosovo aggressively, without his consent; but that, if our humanitarian and political aims, including those regarding the future of the Balkans, can be substantially attained without the total ruin and humiliation of Serbia, we would be prepared to settle for less than total victory.

6.20 pm

Sir Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): There is a long and honourable tradition in the House that in times of conflict right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber give unqualified and wholehearted support to our forces. I am glad that the Conservative party has offered that support since the beginning of the crisis. As a former Regular soldier, I have every reason to understand the importance of that support. However, that does not mean that the Opposition or hon. Members on both sides of the House should renounce their right and duty to examine carefully the performance of the Executive. Indeed, at times of war the monitoring of the Government's performance is even more crucial than it usually is.

Over the past day or two we have had some extraordinary examples of the extent to which the Government are at sea—a matter to which I shall return. A balanced examination of the way in which the Government have handled the Kosovo crisis can conclude only that we are witnessing a fiasco on a scale that this country has not seen for generations. I think that we should have to go back to the Boer war to find a military situation where the enemy has been so thoroughly misunderstood, where planning and foresight have been so glaringly absent and where the strategic concept on which our campaign appears to be based is so greatly at variance with the great majority of military thinking and the experience of our armed forces.

Never can a collection of Ministers—in interviews on television or radio and in articles in the press—have seemed so completely at sea, so entirely unable to control events and so uncomprehending of what is going on. It may be offered as a plea in exculpation that the Government have been dragged into this situation by the United States. As a long-standing admirer of America and much of what that country stands for, I have to say that that is a valid complaint and a valid point to make. However, the US contribution to Europe's security has always been, and continues to be, tremendous, and crucial to Europe, and we Europeans must do more in future to deserve a continuation of American support. The Americans sometimes miscalculate, however; and when

we think they are on the wrong track, we have a duty, as their close friends and allies, to tell them so. Conservative Prime Ministers have done so in the past. The present Prime Minister clearly has failed to do so.

Perhaps both Governments are in the dock, therefore, but the performance of the US Government is a matter for the American Congress and the American people. It cannot be used in a plea of mitigation for the British Government.

The list of charges is lengthy, so I can offer only a selection. For a year the Government blustered with Milosevic hoping to browbeat him into acceptable behaviour. When that failed, they turned to aerial bombardment, apparently hoping that that would achieve his rapid submission. They have been surprised that the use of air power has not brought the success they were after. Yet, as we have heard so often this evening, the vast majority of military commentators could have told them, and did tell them, what would happen.

The use of air power alone hardly ever works. The Government have been surprised not only that Milosevic is still there but that he now enjoys more popular support than he did when the bombing started. They have been surprised that once the action began Serb atrocities against the Kosovars increased, so that since 24 March thousands more have been killed and hundreds of thousands have been turned into refugees. The figure offered today by the United National Development Programme is that 600,000 refugees have been created in recent weeks. The Government gratuitously told Milosevic that NATO would not use ground troops, thus giving him more reason to hope that he could secure a satisfactory settlement of the terrible situation that he had created. The Government told Milosevic that he would be tried as a war criminal, giving him a further incentive to hold out against the bombing and to refuse to negotiate. The list is much longer.

Even this Government, having reached this situation, must surely accept that we cannot merely continue with the bombing month after month after month. The Foreign Secretary has given us no idea of when the bombing might achieve any sort of success. There are now only two choices facing NATO Governments. They could call off the bombardment and patch up whatever accommodation they can manage with Milosevic, perhaps hoping that the Russians will come to see it as being somehow in their own interest to play a constructive role. Or they could recognise what they should have understood before they started to threaten the Serbs and before they started the bombing, which is that they will achieve their aims only by backing up the aerial bombardment with the use of land forces.

I believe that things have gone too far for the first option to be acceptable. Quite apart from the messy situation that it would leave in Kosovo and the neighbouring states, it would represent a massive and humiliating defeat for NATO. Such a defeat is something that we and all western nations simply could not afford, for many reasons which I think most Members will appreciate.

Of course, the ground force option has great difficulties, not least because it has been so emphatically ruled out by the Government until quite recently. However, I refuse to accept that the most successful military alliance ever created is unable to tackle the Yugoslav army, particularly once the military infrastructure pounding takes its effect, bearing in mind what we have seen over the past three or four weeks.

From this Government-created fiasco we must learn important lessons for the future. We must never again be sleepwalked into this sort of mess by a Government who are bemused by spin doctoring and who understand so little of the military and strategic realities that modern Governments have to face. In this post-cold war world, are we and our western allies prepared to intervene in sovereign states for humanitarian reasons? I am inclined to think that the answer to that question will be—and perhaps should be—yes, if only because of what they refer to in the United States as the CNN factor. If we are to intervene, it must be on the basis of clear thinking and careful planning. Those factors have been totally absent from the Government's handling of the Kosovo affair.

We must examine what role there will be for the UN and the Security Council. What will this mean for the common foreign and security policy of the European Union and for the European defence and security identity? How will this affect our relations with the US? All those questions are for another day. The Government must now say to their NATO allies that the Kosovo affair must be brought to an acceptable conclusion, and that can be done only with the use of land forces.

6.28 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I share with colleagues an abhorrence of ethnic cleansing and condemn unreservedly any atrocities committed by either side. If evidence is available, the perpetrators should be prosecuted. I condemn also the war that is waged by NATO against the people of Yugoslavia, which is why this weekend I visited Yugoslavia to learn at first hand the people's views about how the bombing is affecting their lives and what they see of the future.

I visited Novi Sad on Saturday and stood with citizens of that multi-ethnic city on the one remaining bridge across the Danube. Twenty-six ethnic communities live peacefully in Vojvodina and they were all represented on the bridge. I and the journalists who accompanied me were allowed to mix freely with the people. We were under no restrictions as we talked to the people about the refugee crisis and the bombing. We heard many expressions of sympathy from the ordinary people on that bridge. They overwhelmingly blamed NATO for the escalation of the problem in Kosovo; that united them. *[Interruption.]* They referred to the Kosovo Liberation Army as people who had perpetrated serious acts, and compared the position with other situations in the world involving the Kurds and the IRA.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) felt fit to laugh when the people about whom I was talking live under nightly bombardments. They have a right to express a view. Such cheap behaviour does not do anything to enhance the debate.

The people in Novi Sad know what is happening. They watch CNN and BBC television. They know what happened to the Zastrava—

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) *rose*—

Mrs. Mahon: I will not give way.

[Mrs. Mahon]

The people in Novi Sad know what happened to the Zastrava car and tractor factory, where the workers staged a sit-in. They faxed the co-ordinates to NATO and Clinton, but NATO still went ahead and sent 25 cruise missiles to bomb that factory. If hon. Members visited the factory, as I did, they would think it a miracle that nobody died—160 were injured—and they could still go into the centre, where the sit-in was, to see the blood splattered over the makeshift beds and chairs.

When the sirens went, there was no chancé to evacuate everyone and people saved themselves by getting under the main structure, carrying the injured with them. Somehow it held and lives were not lost. The bombing that night shattered the heating plant that serves a large residential area—it was completely destroyed—and a large area is without any heating whatever.

The workers whom I met and talked to quite freely were pretty angry. They wanted me to give a message to the House. They said that they had harmed nobody. Many of them had demonstrated against Milosevic, but they asked me to say, "We will fight for our country in every town, every village and every house and behind every tree. If the Americans use defoliants, as they did in Vietnam, we will fight from tunnels. We are not going to give up." That is the message from the Zastrava factory and from the bridge at Novi Sad, which is the only one standing. The bridges have been bombed. As any civil engineer would tell the House, when a bridge crosses a river it carries the water supply—in this case, to the main hospital. That has gone, and so have all the cables.

As has been said, bombing bridges harms civilians; in this case, it has. Tremendous damage has been done to the civilian population. An hour after we left, the heaviest bombing yet took place in Novi Sad. These bombs are hitting civilian targets.

Early on Sunday morning, I heard the sirens. A bombing attack was taking place on Pancevo, where petrol tanks and the chemical factory went up. Pancevo is about five or six miles outside Belgrade. I stood looking out my hotel bedroom window, wondering what to do and watching clouds of noxious fumes go up, as the plant took a direct hit.

On Sunday, I visited a small town called Chubria. I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary would not let me intervene earlier, because I have brought a message from a citizen of that town. It was bombed in the early hours of 8 April: one woman was killed, five were injured and 400 residential homes were either flattened or badly damaged. This is not propaganda; I witnessed it with my own eyes. In the town centre, a school of nursing, a department store and the sports hall—500 m from where the seven bombs fell—have been badly damaged.

I talked to a dentist and his wife who referred to themselves as "collateral damage". Their home was completely destroyed above their heads as they hid for shelter in the cellar. The wife was injured and they are deeply traumatised. The so-called military target was a long-time disused barracks 2 km from the residential area. That attack was on civilians, as were the attacks on the train, the factories and the refugee column. It is no good telling these people, as they run each night into their bomb shelters, that NATO is not attacking them. They know that it is. That town opposed Milosevic; it is now 100 per cent. behind him.

On Sunday evening, we visited Pancevo, where the oil refineries and the chemical plant were blazing out of control. Restrictions meant that we were not allowed to film and talk to the staff, but workers died there during the previous bombing raid, and I got the feeling—which can be translated into any language—that there was no way that they wanted to talk to us. I could taste and smell the fumes and I was glad to get out of there. Of course, there is nowhere for those people to go.

I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who has taken a great interest in refugees and knows a lot about them. I firmly believe that, if we are to help those miserable refugees, we need a political solution—not an ultimatum. NATO can wreak massive damage and destroy Yugoslavia, but that will not get a single Kosovar refugee home. The Yugoslavs will negotiate, but they will not accept a foreign occupation by NATO.

Those who now beat so euphorically the drums of war for ground troops to go in would soon be despairing, when the body bags started coming home. President Clinton might have the reassurances of the Heads of Government in Macedonia, Montenegro and Bulgaria, but what about the support of the people—the majority of whom are Serbs? In Montenegro, Djukanovic hangs on by a thread, threatened not by Milosevic, but by his own people.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Would it be helpful for my hon. Friend to know that she has the support of the Montenegrin Education Minister, who faxed me at home this weekend? He simply said that it was quite clear that there could be no winners in such a war and appealed to this Parliament to recognise that the Montenegrin people—who do not support Milosevic, but are deeply opposed to the bombing—want the peace that the bombing stands in the way of.

Mrs. Mahon: I thank my hon. Friend. I am glad that I gave way; that was a useful intervention.

Meanwhile, the Russians are sidelined. Russia is already aiding Yugoslavia—the Duma wants to arm it and send in troops. It could get much, much worse. The Russians say, "Why shouldn't we, because the KLA is helped by the Americans?" I have to tell the House that the Kosovo Liberation Army had 18 American advisers with it at Rambouillet, and everybody knows that weapons are coming in from there.

The United Nations and Russia could broker a peace. Yeltsin's warning today should not be ignored, in my opinion. Members of the House who laugh about that should remember that Russia still has many nuclear weapons and is in an unstable situation. It is in our interests to get the Russians involved. Yugoslavia would accept a large, unarmed multinational group and UN or Russian brokering, and they must be brought into the negotiations.

The international community could oversee such an agreement with massive aid for a settlement and for rebuilding—not only in Kosovo, but in Serbia itself, which has suffered millions of pounds of damage through the NATO bombing. The alternative—ground troops—is absolute nonsense. There would be massive loss of life and invasion would be very difficult, as we have heard from people who are far more experienced than I am.

The people of Yugoslavia feel deep bitterness and anger. I spoke to a veteran who housed a Royal Air Force fighter pilot during the war, at great risk to him and his

family. I cannot express how he feels. They have sympathy for the Kosovars. It is nonsense to say that they do not know what is happening. Many of them cannot do anything about Milosevic, but would like to if they could.

Are we seriously going to follow slavishly American policy that devastates another part of the world, after Afghanistan, Cambodia and many other places, or are we going to do the only thing that makes sense? We should start talking and stop bombing.

6.38 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I begin by making two parliamentary points. First, I agree very much with what the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has said. We should be debating a substantive motion. In a democracy, a Government who wish to pursue a campaign for explicit objectives should come to the House and get explicit authority, both for the war and for the objectives. I know that holding an Adjournment debate is in accordance with precedent; I regret that precedent and believe that a substantive motion should be before the House.

Secondly, and differently, I regret the underlying feeling in some parts of the House that it is wrong during a war to criticise the conduct of the Executive. The service men deserve our admiration and our support, but we, as Members of the House, have a duty to express our views as we have them. Frequently, we do best that way in serving the interests of the service men. Let us not forget that, as a result of the criticisms made of the Government in the Norway debate in May 1940, Mr. Chamberlain resigned and was replaced by Churchill. I do accept, however, that, when we express ourselves, we need to be careful not to encourage Mr. Milosevic in his obduracy.

I am one of those Members who oppose, and opposed, the decision to resort to bombing. I have expressed my reasons before, so I shall be brief, but in substance they are these. First, there are compelling arguments against becoming involved in civil wars. Secondly, I do not believe that Britain's strategic interests are sufficiently prejudiced by Mr. Milosevic. Thirdly, I do not believe that our declared objectives can readily be achieved by the resources being made available by NATO. The plain truth is that we are in this position because NATO painted itself into a corner by the threats that it made, so it had no alternative. That should not have happened.

First, it is a sad fact that, thus far, this campaign has not been well managed. NATO did not fully anticipate the ferocity of Mr. Milosevic's response in Kosovo. It should have done. Secondly, NATO does not fully understand the determination of Milosevic or the Serbian people. It should do. Thirdly, we have not made available to the NATO command sufficient air force. Where are the Apache helicopters now? Lastly, we deprived ourselves of the leverage that might have been available to us, had we decided to deploy more ground troops into theatre.

May I make one point with regard to what has happened in Kosovo? Of course, Milosevic intended to move against the Kosovo Liberation Army, and that would have resulted in much killing of Kosovars. The extent of what has happened is not the result of our action; but, in a sense, our action was the occasion of it, because Milosevic used the withdrawal of the monitors and the start of bombing as an excuse and an occasion for what happened. His is the moral culpability, but we should not say that what has happened would have happened in any event.

May I make two points about Milosevic and the Serbs? I have had at least four extended meetings with Milosevic and have been to Belgrade on many an occasion. Milosevic is an extremely formidable opponent. He is stubborn, ruthless, intelligent and devoid of moral scruples—the most dangerous kind of opponent. The Serbian people are determined to resist what they regard as an act of aggression. They are united by the fact of the bombing and, to endorse what the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) said, they place great value on Kosovo being part of Serbia.

The war objectives have been detailed today by the Foreign Secretary. I am bound to say that they are being developed as we go along. In truth, they are little more than a demand for unconditional surrender by the Serbs. So far as Milosevic is concerned, they are made even more unpalatable by the fact that his arraignment before the International War Crimes Tribunal is clearly being contemplated—as, in one sense, it should be. However, we shall not find those objectives easy to secure, and we shall not secure them unless we beat the Serbs on the field of battle.

We have three options: first, a unilateral decision to discontinue; secondly, to go for broke; and, thirdly, to come to some compromise. I am not in favour of unilateral discontinuation. We have gone too far for that and NATO's credit is too heavily pledged; nor am I in favour of going for broke, because either the bombing would have to be so intense as to become immoral, or ground forces would have to be deployed in an outright war, and I am not in favour of that. Therefore, we must go for a compromise, giving Milosevic what he most certainly does not deserve and giving to the Kosovars less than they merit. Partition will probably be the outcome of all that.

I shall make four concluding remarks because I have only four minutes left. First, I do not expect the Government to articulate support for what I have just said—at least, not in public. All that I ask of them is not to paint themselves into further corners. We do not want to over-extend our commitment. We do not want, in due time when we enter into a compromise, to have to make a feast of statements previously uttered. Secondly, we need to move swiftly to a compromise agreement. It will have to be made privately and will probably involve both the Russians and the United Nations. Thirdly, we shall probably be faced with a long-term problem of resettling many Kosovars because, even doing the best that we can, not all Kosovars will return to Kosovo, especially if there is a partition. This country, in common with all others, will have to be generous in that regard. Lastly, we shall require forces in Kosovo. Whether it is partitioned or not, there is a long-standing commitment ahead of us. We must ask ourselves whether there are forces sufficient to do that and contemplate whether more should be brought into theatre now.

The options are bleak. I wish that we were not in this position. Our policy should be to avoid action that gives Milosevic what he needs and wants. We should not involve ourselves in a policy of total war. At the same time, however, we must realise that a total fulfilment of the stated objectives will not happen. We must work for a compromise, and soon.

6.48 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I cannot remember, in my 12 years as a Member of the House, ever taking part in a debate in which I am so opposed to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). I do not feel comfortable disagreeing with my right hon. Friend, but I have to say that I disagreed with much of what he said. His analysis was wrong and I was dismayed to hear of his blind faith in the ability of the United Nations to solve everything. Anyone who understands how the United Nations operates knows that Russia and China would have used their veto, and action would never have been taken against Milosevic had we depended on that. The blue beret argument is not, therefore, sustainable, which is why I cannot support it.

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) asked why we were in Kosovo. Perhaps we should concentrate on that considered question. It is because of the evil behaviour of Milosevic. It is a humanitarian catastrophe, and I have no problem with being on the left of politics and supporting action to defend a humanitarian cause, as we are doing in Kosovo. I just wish that hon. Members who argue against the NATO action in Kosovo, which they have a right to do, would not slant their arguments against America. Their arguments lose credence when they are articulated in such a way.

Having said that, I, too, have criticisms about what has led us to this position. War is the result of diplomatic failure and/or the lack resolve to recognise evil when we are confronted by it. We were confronted by Milosevic in 1990 when he invaded Slovenia. It does not come well from the Conservative party to criticise what is happening now, given the inaction at the beginning of the decade, which allowed Milosevic to perpetrate his evil even further.

I sit at home the same as any other citizen and I do not necessarily express my view because of opinion polls in my constituency. However, when I speak to my constituents, I know what their feelings are. Nobody likes the thought of being involved in such a conflict, but it is difficult to find many people in my constituency who do not agree that there was a need to take some action.

We should not forget that Milosevic put 40,000 troops and 300 tanks in Kosovo to carry out his policy of ethnic cleansing. That precipitated the need for action to stop him. In fairness, the refugee crisis could not have been properly estimated. I find it difficult to get my mind around the concept of what leads people to be so evil to one another. I know that that is happening on both sides, but we know what Milosevic is doing.

I read a report last week about a 10-year-old boy who was sheltering in a house with 14 relatives. The two men of the house were hiding in the hills because, until then, Milosevic's murdering gangs had not killed women and children. However, they burned down the house, killing nine children and five women. The little boy was shot in the arm and faked death—the only way he survived. We must understand why we are in Kosovo.

I went to the NATO headquarters with the Defence Committee in January—and here is where I have some criticism. Let me be perfectly blunt: my criticism is not that action was taken, but that it should have been taken earlier. It certainly should have been taken when Slovenia was invaded and the Bosnian war started. At the beginning of the year, we knew that Milosevic was getting his troops together. That is when we should have moved.

At NATO headquarters, a British general told us that there was a triangle of ways, means and endgame. I do not blame the military, which had the ways and means, but not the endgame. The vacillation on that matter has caused much of the confusion and many of the problems.

It was foolish to say that we would not send in ground troops; I do not see the sense or the rationale in that. I support the Government in not sending ground troops in at present; but, if we had had that endgame at the beginning, it might have affected the thinking of Milosevic.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hood: No, I am sorry. I will not give way, because I have only 10 minutes.

Mention has been made of Russia. I was in Moscow some weeks ago, and I met Russian politicians in the Duma. We understand that Russian presidential and parliamentary elections are pending. Hon. Members are right—I am sure that the Foreign Secretary, who is in his seat, and all Governments understand this—in thinking that the Russians are central to reaching a solution. My view is that the Russians told Milosevic to settle at the Rambouillet peace discussions, but that Milosevic did not believe that NATO would take action. To use an unparliamentary term, Milosevic told the Russians to get stuffed. The Russians are now in a difficult position.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) talked of compromise; compromise is appeasement in these situations. I say, "Shame on that solution." To those who want to stop the killing—as we all do—I say that only action will stop the killing in Kosovo. To those who talk about UN solutions, I say that we have three UN resolutions. To those who are wavering, I ask them to look through the eyes of that 10-year-old boy in Kosovo who faked death while 14 members of his family lay dead beside him.

6.55 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I recognise that the Government and NATO were faced with a sensitive situation following the breakdown of the Rambouillet talks. The choice was clear to many at the time; either we did nothing, or we intervened on humanitarian grounds to end the brutality of ethnic cleansing. I was not surprised, therefore, that the Government—together with their NATO partners—took the unanimous decision to support intervention by the use of force. Nor was I surprised that, faced with the prospect of a well-armed enemy in a hostile environment, the nations concerned were reluctant to risk the prospect of heavy casualties, and opted for an aerial bombardment.

The Foreign Secretary will accept that there was a desire to contain the conflict and to prevent it from spreading through the Balkans, leading to the involvement of Russia. There has been every attempt to try to keep Russia on-side. I recognise the political considerations, having been in the Army in the second world war and, subsequently, a Minister under Lord Carrington when we had to deal with the opening difficulties in Northern

Ireland. That reminds me that we must balance military force with military feasibility and political consideration if we are to bring public opinion along with us.

What worries me is that public opinion expects quick results and—invariably in today's atmosphere, and as a result of our history since the war—a bloodless war. It would be inexcusable if, in the course of listening to public opinion and looking at the difficulties, we allowed the reputation of NATO to suffer. That is the point on which I wish to concentrate.

As a member of the NATO parliamentary assembly, I—along with colleagues from the House—will be attending the NATO summit this weekend. I am concerned about the effect of what we say there and what we do now in Kosovo on people's present perception of NATO, and of the alliance itself. For 50 years, the alliance has kept the peace. I conclude that if the public are likely to grow more and more impatient about what is happening, they will look to NATO and say that NATO has failed. It would be inexcusable to allow that to happen.

Throughout the cold war, NATO was regarded as the most successful political and military alliance in modern history. It faced, on a fixed border, a tough enemy with a single front line. NATO bluffed it out; not just with words, but with a willingness and conviction that, if necessary, force would be used. There was no question that nuclear forces would have been used if there had been an attack by the then Soviet Union.

Since then, NATO has turned its attention to adapting the alliance to enlarge its membership. It has embarked on a new relationship with Russia, as a result of the NATO Russian Founding Act. It has made other arrangements through "Partnership for Peace" with former enemy countries. NATO is looking at the new threats to European security which could emanate from outside its previously established frontiers. NATO started on a formidable task of reshaping its strategy which was not complete when this situation blew up in our faces.

How do we give effect to the NATO strategy in a way that entails implementing changes in its modus operandi? The thinking is there, but it is not reflected on the ground. There is a recognition of the need for more flexible forces, which are capable of quicker responses and able to cope with sudden outbreaks of violence, terrorism, drugs, refugees, chemical and biological missiles, as well as with peace enforcement, peacekeeping and regional disputes that could affect the security of the NATO Euro-Atlantic alliance. It would be a tragedy if NATO's capabilities, and our confidence in it, were besmirched during the transition.

Talk of sending thousands of ground troops to deal with the Serbian crisis invariably leads to questions about whether NATO is up to the job. Indeed, such questions have already been asked. I think that we are all aware of the risks, which have been mentioned today. The ports of entry are inadequate, the airfields are limited and the terrain is hostile, favouring guerrilla warfare. In any event, the build-up of additional forces would take some months.

The following question than arises. If ground forces are to be used—and I think that they are needed—which country will bear the biggest burden? Obviously it will be the United States which hitherto has shown a marked reluctance to send troops to NATO to help us to discharge our duty. That is hardly a recipe for a more balanced and efficient alliance.

I think that this has emerged from the dispute. The European alliance cannot go on expecting the United States to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. The imbalance between our technology and that of the United States forces is one of the reasons why we are not more effective in the present struggle. We need better logistics, intelligence-gathering and communications; we need allies in high-tech systems. The gap between the European members of the alliance and the United States inhibits the development of a better and more respectable working relationship for NATO in the next century, as well as in the current crisis. Meanwhile, we cannot allow the Kosovo situation to undermine the harmony between the allies that has been such a cardinal principle of NATO's success, or to damage our confidence in its future and its ability to play its full part in the present crisis.

7.2 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Terrible things are happening now, and the only chance of preventing more from happening during the next few weeks will be through entering into talks with President Milosevic, unpalatable and unpopular though that option may be. What other way is there?

Let me ask the Foreign Secretary about war crimes. If he were to learn that, day after day, he and his colleagues were to be arraigned for such crimes, what would be his reaction? It would be to fight to the death. It must also be taken into account—although we may not find it easy to understand—that many Serbs now want to be heroes, as their grandfathers were when they fought the Wehrmacht and were Tito's partisans. That is the psychology. Any ground war would therefore be a formidable undertaking, rendered all the more formidable by the fact that the only point of entry is over Albania, which features an unsatisfactory infrastructure and mountains rising to 6,000 ft. Where else is there any entry?

Let me ask another question. Is it wise for western leaders to repeat time and again that the Kosovar Albanians have asked them to continue the bombardment? Let us suppose that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was a Serbian soldier in Kosovo, and knew that the bombings described by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) were taking place in his area, damaging factories and, inevitably, causing collateral damage. What would be his attitude to those who, we are repeatedly told, have asked for the bombing to continue, and to continue more intensely?

My right hon. Friend says that he has spoken to the Foreign Ministers of seven countries. What is the position of the Greeks? We read, for example, that the Mayor of Athens has asked for the bombing to end forthwith. I hope that my right hon. Friend, the Defence Secretary, will tell us something about that when he winds up the debate.

I also want to ask about the Kosovo Liberation Army. In an intervention that was not well received, I directly quoted from the report of the German federal police. Have Ministers seen that report? Have they seen the Europol report? I have seen extracts, but they may have seen the full report. If I am wrong, no doubt they will say so.

I am among those who were here in the late 1960s, during the arguments about Vietnam. If I go into the Lobby tonight with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), it will be partly because I feel that Parliament has been insufficiently considered in all

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

this. Thirty years ago, Harold Wilson—who took a rather different view on Vietnam from his party at the beginning—used to sit here hour after hour listening to what was said, as did many senior members of the Government. Harold Wilson—and it was not his party's large majority that made him do this—stood up to pressures from Lyndon Johnson that, because of the financial situation and the state of the pound, were far greater than those being exerted now by an American president. I think that it is a loss to the country that Parliament was not heeded much earlier, when the dissenters could at least have had their say.

During the last debate on Kosovo, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said that there were no problems with the Russians. He had been having valuable discussions about Murmansk, the future of the Soviet Arctic fleet and the millennium, which could potentially lead to a very dangerous situation. Are those discussions continuing, or have they been broken off? The Russians are extremely angry about what they, and those in much of the rest of the world, see as cost-free militarism.

Let me return to the subject of Vietnam for a moment. Troop numbers are increased constantly in the search for the elusive light at the end of the tunnel: that is the situation that we seem to be in. Have we learned from Vietnam?

Let me ask specifically about pollution. What, in the view of Foreign Office Ministers, is the truth about what happened last night, and has happened before, in regard to chemical plants? What happens if a nuclear plant is hit?

There is also a Serbian point of view, which I want to put in the words of a Serbian citizen whom I would prefer not to name. She writes:

"I restate: the ignorance on which NATO based its attack constitutes criminality.

To explain by means of the simplest metaphor. You are kindly invited into someone's house. You are plied with cakes and tea. You take up residence. You produce a large, very large, number of children at great speed. You like the house and ask for it to be given you. When this is refused you take out a gun, having previously armed yourself illegally, and try to shoot me. The shot fails so you call in NATO, with its 19 nations, including the most powerful nation in the world, to shoot me for you."

I am not saying whether that should be endorsed. All I am saying is that it is a view that we had better take account of and that the Serbs are extremely determined people. NATO's bombs have blasted the germinating seeds of democracy out of the soil of Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro and ensured that they will not sprout again for a very long time.

The solution that has been given by Sir Michael Howard should be considered. He is Chichele professor of the history of war. He says:

"The alternative is a negotiated settlement that Serbia can live with, even if it does not satisfy the maximal demands of either side. The danger is that public opinion in the West is now becoming so heated that any compromise settlement will be condemned as surrender or, worse, 'appeasement' and no Allied leader will dare to recommend it. But the longer the war goes on, the less likely it is that this option will remain open.

Sometimes making peace requires as much courage as waging war."

Making peace requires as much courage as making war: that is the point that I should like to leave the House with. We should have the courage to start negotiations as the only hope of saving the plight of those people in Kosovo and, indeed, saving much more.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I call Mr. David Heath.

7.11 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I apologise to the hon. Members who have already spoken and to the House that I was not able to be present earlier. I hope that the House will forgive me when I explain that I left Skopje at 3 o'clock this morning and have been travelling ever since. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I heard some hon. Gentleman make a remark about why the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) was called. He was called because I called him.

Mr. Heath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I was in Skopje because I was representing the House on behalf of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs at an important meeting of the Royaumont process, which was attempting to rebuild the structure of south-eastern Europe. I am pleased to report that, at the meeting, we reached a joint position. It was agreed by all the countries that were represented, including all the Balkan states, with the exception of Serbia, which was not present. The meeting was attended by many European Union states, including Greece. It condemned Mr. Milosevic's position and called on him to accept the NATO requirements for the withdrawal of forces and for the establishment of an international force.

My reason for rising to speak is to express in an inadequate way my reaction to having been at the Stankovac I camp, the Brazda camp, last night and to having seen for myself the pitiful position of the Kosovar refugees there. I wish to bring to the House whatever I can of their experience.

People say that one has to experience war truly to know what it means. Perhaps one has to experience the after effects of war to understand what that means as well. I feel humbled by having met people who are in that position. The stories that those refugees told me last night will live with me for ever. I do not think that I can properly express the brutality that they have suffered in Kosovo.

I heard stories of people being burned alive in their houses. I heard stories of babies being taken away from the arms of their mothers immediately after birth and thrown away, throwing away a young life. I heard from a six-year old girl who had lost all her family. She did not know where her sisters were, or whether they were dead or alive. She was alone in the teeming camp of refugees.

The most precious commodity in the camp was one that I could provide temporarily: a mobile telephone. With that, refugees could at least attempt to let someone know where they were. There was no other mechanism to do so. One of the most poignant things is the wall in the camp, where little notes suggest where people might be—where in Macedonia, Albania, Turkey, Germany or wherever else they might be taken—so that those families might, in time, be reunited.

It is a well-ordered camp because of the involvement of British troops, who have been instrumental in setting it up. I say that the camp is well ordered—there are tents and some structure—but there is inadequate sanitation. There are no cooking facilities. There are no facilities for children to play. That may seem a trivial matter, but it is not when we consider the age range of the people there. There is nothing to bring any sense of normality to those people's lives after the experiences that they have had in escaping from Kosovo.

The British soldiers whom I met there, some of them from the west country, were remarkable in their resilience and determination. One of the comments that I heard from an Albanian was how pleased he was to see the British contingent. He said that, however hard the British service men worked, they were always smiling and the refugees did not usually see people in uniform smiling. It made a big impression on him that there were at least some people bringing humanity to the situation. The one thing that the refugees wished to report was the Macedonian guards, to whom I will return. The position of Macedonia is important.

The refugees had two messages that they wanted me to give to the House. I spoke to many hundreds as I went around. One message was their determination to go home. That is their simple wish. They want to go home and to rebuild their lives. They do not want to be evacuated for good, or to stay in Macedonia or Albania. They do not want to create some new political structure. They simply want to go home and to continue their lives.

I asked the refugees the question that we have all asked: was the NATO action making things better or worse? Not a single person said anything other than, "Please continue to the end. The only hope we have is for NATO action to continue."

My fear is that those camps have great capacity to deteriorate. One matter has caused me concern. I ask the Foreign Secretary to take note of it and perhaps to take further action. Macedonia is in a frightful position in the war. I have the greatest sympathy for its Government. It is a small, fragile country that is having great difficulty in bringing the resources to bear that are needed to deal with the massive influx of people, which is out of all proportion to anything that we could imagine.

As those people are fond of telling us, the equivalent would be 5 million people turning up on the coast of Kent asking for succour. That is a huge burden for the Macedonians to bear. I salute them in their efforts and for the integrity that they have brought to the process. However, the views of some people in Macedonia are not as we would want them to be. They do not think in the way in which we would like. The Macedonian guards have been guilty of beating people up and of switching on hoses to flood parts of the camp.

The refugees are telling us that the only thing stopping the guards is the presence of foreign troops—that small contingent. It may only be 30 troops, the number may be nominal, but that is what is stopping the guards. We need to maintain a presence there of troops from Britain or some other NATO force to stop that happening. In the longer term, what needs to happen is for those camps to come under United Nations control and for UN troops to maintain the camps. There is no overall control at the moment. That is worrying.

On Saturday, I was told by Albanian Members of Parliament that they applauded everything that was being done and saluted the efforts of the western powers, but that only 30 per cent. of the aid that they had been promised had arrived and that they were getting desperate. I wonder whether the Foreign Secretary could tell us why that might be so.

When one is in the area, one cannot escape watching the Serbian satellite television and the diet of propaganda that the Serbs receive, which to us is horrifying. It is a constant repeat of what are termed NATO atrocities. There are pictures of people in Pristina and across Kosovo waving Yugoslav flags and holding up pictures of Mr. Milosevic, saying what a splendid fellow he is. We know that that is not the position in Kosovo. Every small grain of dissent outside Serbia against NATO's action is magnified to the point at which it is said that every capital in western Europe is up in arms against their Governments. We should recognise that and we should realise that words in this Chamber are heard and used elsewhere in a way that I am sure that no Member of the House would wish.

I do not believe that there is any longer a Kosovo solution. We must grasp for a wider solution and I believe that it will involve the use of ground troops. I beg the Government not to rule that out, and I hope that it will happen sooner rather than later. What I have seen in the camps makes me believe that the situation is untenable and will remain so for a long time.

7.21 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): We have heard moving accounts from several hon. Members who have visited the refugee camps, including the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). I agree with the military action and I have made my views clear on previous occasions in the House. However, I understand the wish for a vote. After all, it is not a secret outside the House of Commons that there are those who disagree. My view is that if a vote were taken—and on such an issue, we should have a vote—we would see an overwhelming majority in favour of the action that NATO is taking.

Some of the criticism that is being made of reporting from Belgrade—apparently not by Ministers but by other sources—is misguided. The truth should be told. If certain feelings in Belgrade exist, as reported by John Simpson and other correspondents, let us know. Likewise, when a terrible mistake was made last week when the very people whom NATO were trying to save were killed, no one, not even Serbia, has since suggested that that was a deliberate killing. If such mistakes are made, with such terrible consequences, it is better that the truth be told, and as quickly as possible. If we have a just cause, that is all the more reason for the truth to be told.

If this debate were taking place last year, many of the critics would tell us that the action led by the United States was taken because President Clinton was trying to hold on to his job. We heard that argument on several occasions during the crisis over Iraq. That argument will not wash today, because the US President does not fear for his job. If there were some sinister conspiracy by the US to engage in military action for dubious reasons, why did it take the lead role in bringing about the Dayton agreement that ended the conflict in Bosnia? Was not bombing one of the factors that made that agreement possible?

[Mr. David Winnick]

If the Serbian leadership had shown serious interest in the talks in France earlier this year, even if they did not agree with every point, the military action would not have taken place, because it would not have been necessary. As I understand it, none of the critics here disputes the terrible crimes that have been committed by Serbian forces in Kosovo, such as the rapes, the murders and the ethnic cleansing that is a disgrace to Europe. In January, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a statement on the cold-blooded murder of 45 ethnic Albanians, committed for no other reason than their ethnic origin. I asked at the time whether Muslim blood was of such little concern that we should not take action to try to prevent further crimes and atrocities. Having said that, I am hardly in a position to criticise what is now being done.

I accept that Britain's interests were not directly threatened by what was taking place in Kosovo and that our safety and security were not in danger as a result of actions there. However, one could have made the same argument about the Gulf in 1990. Indeed, it was made by the critics, including Enoch Powell in an article in *The Daily Telegraph* in August 1990. He argued that the invasion of Kuwait was not a matter for Britain to intervene in. That argument could also have been made in 1939. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark)—I gave him notice that I intended to mention him—takes the view that we should not have gone to war in 1939 and, having done so, we should have negotiated for peace a year later. That is his view, and it is in the public domain.

I listened today with interest to the passionate outbursts against what is being done, but I remember the same passionate remarks—by Labour Members, if not by Conservative Members—being made against the action in the Falklands following the invasion. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) denounced that action on every possible occasion, but events have demonstrated that Britain was right to liberate the Falklands. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and my hon. Friends the Members for Linlithgow and for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) were in full cry against the liberation of Kuwait and Britain's involvement with the allies. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield has argued that the action in Kosovo was not authorised by the United Nations, but when the UN authorised the liberation of Kuwait, he still opposed it. I do not criticise him for that, because he had every right to oppose it. I do not criticise any of those who criticise the action in Kosovo—this is a free Parliament—but we should be clear about the background of the past 10 years of some of those who are so passionately against it.

Although Britain's interest was not directly involved, it would have been wrong and dishonourable for the allies to stand aside and allow the ethnic cleansing to continue unhindered. We know what is being done. I have mentioned the deliberate murder of 45 ethnic Albanians, but that is only one of many crimes that were committed. As for the argument that the bombing has made the position worse, one could also say that about 1939. Hitler warned in the Reichstag that if the Jews were responsible for a new world war—the very war that he was planning to the last detail—they would pay the consequences. Are we in Britain to be taken to task for what happened to the Jews? We know full well where the responsibility lies. What is happening now in Kosovo—the continued ethnic cleansing, the way that the people have been forced to flea in terror—is not Britain's fault or NATO's fault: it is the consequence of the actions by Milosevic and his thugs. Let us put the responsibility where it belongs.

I accept that the use of ground forces poses many problems. We should have the greatest reservation about sending in an armed force to fight its way into Kosovo. The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) spoke about the pride of the Serbs and the fact that they will not give in to bombing. If they will not give in to bombing, it is not likely that there will be an easy way into Kosovo. The dangers include the widening of the war and having to fight in Serbia itself. I do not rule that out, but I hope that it will not be necessary. However, if the Serbian leadership refuse even to consider any of the peace plans, like the one suggested by Germany last week, then clearly an invasion on the ground becomes more likely. The British Government and other allied Governments criticised aspects of that plan, but the way in which Milosevic and his colleagues rejected it suggested that Belgrade in no way seeks a solution to the problem.

What is our basic minimum? What do we want? First, all refugees should be able to return to Kosovo: that is not asking too much. They should be able to return in safety, and that requires international military force. Whether that force is led by NATO or someone else is open to negotiation.

Ethnic groups have been mentioned, so I should make clear my concern for the safety of all ethnic groups in Kosovo—majority and minority, including the Serbs. I am not anti-Serb, and nor, I believe, are any of my hon. Friends.

Russia, in particular, and Greece can play important roles in trying to bring about an agreement that can end the bombing, allow refugees to return and result in a settlement. A settlement was on offer in France two months ago, and the bombing could have been avoided. I hope that such an agreement may be reached in the very near future.

7.31 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): When one sees the mediaeval horrors of what is happening in Kosovo, it is natural to say that something must be done. However, the purpose of foreign policy is to protect and promote the interests of the United Kingdom. We should, of course, desire a peaceful and prosperous world, but we must remember that basic principle.

In pursuing that purpose, the main plank of our defence policy for 50 years has been membership of NATO. As a member of the NATO parliamentary assembly, I have come into contact with Russian members of the Duma, and I have studied NATO's strategy within the context of European peace. The American senator, Sam Nunn, said that Russian co-operation in avoiding proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was our most important national security objective. We are causing stress in our relationship with Russia by expanding NATO with three new member countries. As Sam Nunn said, expansion makes Russia more suspicious and less co-operative.

The end of the cold war may have allowed us to become complacent about our relationship with Russia, but we should never forget the pivotal role of that huge

and influential country. Russia is internally confused. The collapse of the Warsaw pact and the exposure of the fallacy of communism mean that Russian communists have lost their sense of purpose and direction. It is as if Italy and Rome had been told that God did not exist and that the pope had been abolished. The Russians are confused by the seismic shocks running through their society.

Where once we thought about the balance of power between the Warsaw pact and NATO, it may be more appropriate to think now of the balance of power within Russia. In planning our diplomatic strategy, we should avoid acts that cause destabilisation in Russia.

I went to Moscow last month for a meeting of a joint committee of seven NATO parliamentarians and seven Russian parliamentarians, which monitors the actions of the permanent joint council of the Founding Act of May 1997, which is intended to promote better co-operation, harmony and understanding between NATO and Russia. Before the NATO attacks in Kosovo, the relationship was friendly and harmonious, although Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary were about to join NATO. The Russian parliamentarians expressed concerns about troop increases in NATO, and we reassured them, pointing out that no nuclear weapons and no substantial conventional forces would be taken into the territory of the new member countries.

Above all, however, the Russian parliamentarians expressed serious concern that NATO might, in the new strategic concept due to be unveiled in a week's time, take it on itself to intervene in sovereign nations and out of area. At that time, NATO parliamentarians were able to stress—as we always had—that NATO was a defensive alliance.

Article 51 of the United Nations charter specifies the inherent right of all countries to self defence. Military action can be justified if another nation develops weapons of mass destruction, as Iraq did, or is known to plot hostile intent, as Libya did. Article 51 could justify the attacks on those two countries. However, in the fuzzy world of international diplomacy, the normal rule must be respect for national borders. If we lose that pole star, all is lost.

NATO's action in Kosovo could not have been more well-meaning, unselfish or well-intended, but the results have been unexpected, and we are entitled to ask some hard questions. Under what head of international law were the NATO attacks on Serbia undertaken? Does that international authority cover air strikes against Serbia, or against the rest of Yugoslavia? One felt a sense of shock to hear that Montenegro, a neutral country, had been attacked.

Does the authority of international law cover all other possible military action? In deciding what action to take against Serbia, what view was taken of Russia's relationship with Serbia? To what extent was Russia consulted? To what extent did NATO take account of the reaction of Russia's Government, and of the internal reaction and its effect on the balance of power, authority and influence in Russia? It has perhaps strengthened the views and influence of hardliners, and weakened the influence of more progressive Russians.

To what extent was it anticipated that NATO action in Kosovo would disrupt co-operation between NATO and Russia under the Founding Act and "Partnership for Peace"? Certainly, co-operation has been disrupted.

I also have some more narrowly focused questions. Were the Government advised that air power, and air power alone, would achieve the objective of preventing ethnic cleansing and restoring harmony? I know that matters have moved on since I was a RAF pilot who, in a later manifestation, shot down another RAF aeroplane, but "clinical" and "bombing" are not words that sit easily together.

From my experience, drawn from four visits to Bosnia, I must point out that peacekeeping failed in Bosnia. The British troops in Vitez had to hunker down in barracks while Muslims and Croats fought all around them. UNPROFOR's peacekeeping failed. Only when a much larger stabilisation force, with American backing, went into Bosnia was peace imposed—not restored.

Unless agreement is reached with all concerned, we cannot imagine that a force going into Kosovo will be welcomed. In that extraordinary terrain, two men can hold up a regiment. It would take thousand upon thousand of men to impose peace in Kosovo. Without agreement, there would be many casualties, and for what?

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said earlier that the Government must be honest and open about their expectations. They must indeed be clear about their objectives, the manner of their implementation and the demands that will be placed on our armed forces if we contemplate action on the ground.

Commentators have repeatedly made the point that the credibility of NATO is at stake in Kosovo. I maintain that that is not so in respect of the main issue. Article 5 of the Washington treaty says that members of NATO will join together in self defence, defending each other against attack. That is not in dispute in any way.

What is a matter of contention, rightly, is that NATO is acting out of area with an ill-conceived strategy. We must move under the umbrella of the United Nations with the largest possible active Russian involvement.

7.39 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): As a former chairman of the Britain-Albania Society and as one of the two people responsible for persuading the former National Heritage Secretary, Mr. David Mellor, to return Albania's stolen gold, I am second to no one in the House in my love for, and concern for the fate of, the Albanians. Neither am I a pacifist. Indeed, I would be ready to go five rounds with practically any hon. Member. There are a few with whom I would quite like to go five rounds. I hope that my views of the campaign will not be attributed to an animus against the Albanians or to spineless pacifism. As a former member of the Army Cadet Force Royal Artillery Battery 2, I could not credibly be accused of that.

On Saturday afternoon, a bomb went off in the centre of a European capital city, creating havoc and chaos. It brought traffic to a standstill. Hundreds if not thousands of people ran from the scene in terror. Sharp pieces of steel penetrated the bodies and the eyes of innocent civilian bystanders. It was, of course, not in Novi Sad or in Belgrade but in Brixton. It traumatised practically all London and scandalised the readers of Sunday morning newspapers.

That was the effect of one crude home-made bomb in Brixton. The same evening, NATO flew 500 sorties against targets in Yugoslavia. I, along with few others in

[Mr. George Galloway]

the House, have had the experience of being under aerial bombardment. With the distinguished war correspondent, Desmond Hammill, I lay with my face pressed to the earth in Eritrea, being bombed from on high by Russian aircraft of the Ethiopian air force.

The terror that I experienced was indescribable. Slices of razor sharp steel and fragmentation—they were fragmentation bombs of exactly the kind that we are dropping in Yugoslavia—tore alive the people who were around me, and I literally ate the earth to try to make myself a smaller target. Others were not as lucky as me, and Desmond Hammill was able to take some award-winning pictures of some of the casualties.

The purposes for which the Ethiopian air force was dropping those bombs were different from NATO's purposes: the Ethiopians were aiming for civilians, and we are not. I have no complaints about the conduct of our Defence Ministers and certainly none about the conduct of British forces in the action. From everything that I have heard, they have behaved with precision and professionalism. My case is that the massive failure is in foreign, not defence policy.

Neither the Eritreans nor the people of Brixton would remotely consider capitulating to the demands of those doing the bombing. The Eritreans did not and the people of Brixton will not. It does not matter how often we escalate the demands. Some hon. Members may have missed the point, but the war aims were deliberately escalated this afternoon, and the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, de facto and de jure, is now being demanded.

Anyone who thinks that the Serbian Government or, still less, the Serbian people and armed forces will voluntarily succumb to such dismemberment knows nothing about history or about the region. Even if, after a bloody invasion and wading through casualties on both sides, Kosovo is severed from Yugoslavia by force, that will be only the beginning of the problem. We will have engendered a depth of bitterness and hatred among a fighting people—the Serbs—that will haunt us for many years.

Everyone has seen the terrible suffering of the Albanian refugees being driven from their homes—yes, by ethnic cleansing enforced by paramilitary thugs and by police and soldiers and, yes, by fear of bombardment—but we have not heard much today about the civil war as a reason for refugees being on the move.

I have heard several odd references to the KLA this afternoon. Is the House aware that last year the KLA was on the US State Department's list of terrorist organisations? It was accused by the US Government of being bankrolled by the proceeds of the heroin trade and loans from characters such as Osama bin Laden. That was said in the *Washington Post*.

When did the KLA cease to be a terrorist organisation and become a partner for which we were ready to go to war? The reality is that the Serbs are not involved in some irrational, maniacal persecution of Albanians. Charles Krauthammer, again in the *Washington Post*, said:

"The reason for the killing in Kosovo is not mindless ethnic hatred but quite rational power politics. There is a guerrilla army of Kosovar Albanians who want independence and are willing to kill to achieve it. And there is a Serb army that wants to keep Kosovo in Yugoslavia and preserve the sovereignty of the state. And it is willing to kill for that."

That was the Government's perspective until a few short months ago. I believe that our failure has been to get carried away in the flood of rhetoric. This wickedness in Kosovo is appalling, but it is not the holocaust. Milosevic is a brute, but he is not Hitler. This is an appalling problem, but it is not the second world war. As the now much maligned correspondent, John Simpson, said in his admirable memoirs, which I read only last weekend, if we persist in treating conflicts as though they were Armageddon, we run the risk of getting in over our heads. That is what we have begun to do, especially with the escalation of our war aims this afternoon.

Let me say to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary that it serves no one's interest to become so carried away that one resorts to hoax and to first world war-style propaganda. We warned him of that in relation to his boy prisoner story in Iraq, which turned out to be a canard. Addressing megaphone insults at the Government of Yugoslavia, with whom we will eventually have to deal, and insulting the family of the President—wrongly, as it turns out, if one reads the letter from Mrs. Milosevic to the Foreign Secretary published in the newspaper—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): It must be true then.

Mr. Galloway: I found her reply persuasive, even if my hon. Friend prefers the Foreign Secretary's version. I thought that Mrs. Milosevic's letter had a certain dignity.

The reality is that Milosevic has the overwhelming support of the Yugoslavian people and we will have to deal with the Government of Yugoslavia if we are to bring the conflict to an end. Addressing insults through megaphones, criminalising people and threatening them with trials is not the way forward.

7.49 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): This grim crisis has made us all realise that the Government's long honeymoon is finally over. We all imagined that destiny would at some time intervene but no one in their worst dreams could have envisaged a destiny as grim as the conflict which has beset Kosovo and threatens to engulf the region. How I wish that our deliberations were illuminated by people of the character and knowledge of Julian Amery and Billy McLean for Albania, Fitzroy Maclean for Yugoslavia, and Monty Woodhouse and Carol Mather for Greece. Unlike theirs, our generation is unused to war, and many have not comprehended the totally determinant effect that it can have on human affairs, nor have they prepared sufficiently for it.

At the beginning of the crisis way back in October, I asked the Foreign Secretary two questions. The first was whose side are we on. Mr. Milosevic has now answered that. Secondly, I asked whether the ultimate solution to the problem of Kosovo was not to be found in self-determination for its people. The Government resolutely turned their face against that option. It is in the tradition of the Foreign Office to do so, and to recognise existing boundaries, but self-determination is often the right solution. It was right when the Soviet Union broke up and its constituent republics became free again. It is what sustains our position in Northern Ireland and our sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. In short, it accords with our democratic tradition, and in Kosovo it accords with the ethnic reality on the ground.

The tragedy is that the pain and grief that we see on our television screens are the consequence of weakness. We must always remember that the consequence of weakness is usually suffering. Both militarily and diplomatically, we have been weak. Our bluff was finally called. The phoney war is over, though at home people might not believe it because the war which we see on our screens is of the sort that people play in amusement arcades. As those who have experience of war know, this is quite different, and painful in human blood and suffering.

This is not a phoney war. I use the word "war" advisedly although the Foreign Secretary does not like it. It is certainly a war for the people of Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia and for the aircrew of the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy, who have now joined the conflict. Day after day, night after night, often in appalling weather and difficult conditions, they go out to prosecute the combat, seeking out difficult targets in difficult circumstances. If it is not war, we are prejudicing the treatment of our aircrew if they have to bale out over what we know to be enemy territories because they would be regarded as common criminals and would not enjoy the safeguards of the Geneva convention. We should strip away the illusions.

Once our country is engaged upon war, there is only one acceptable outcome, and that is victory. We must see it through to the end whatever it may take. The consequences of failure are too dire for the people of Kosovo, who have suffered enough already; for the neighbouring nations and states; and for our alliance, because other dictators and aggressors will take it to heart that our alliance is not prepared to stand up for its rights and for the liberties of its citizens, and ultimately has not the strength and courage to win.

The air offensive is crucial at every stage of the conflict. First, it has to secure the air superiority without which nothing can be achieved on the ground. Secondly, it has to isolate the Kosovo battlefield and conduct a strategic effort to degrade the Serbian war machine and economy and take out its fuel supplies and transport, communications, command and control systems.

There is also a tactical air campaign to be won. This is perhaps even more difficult. It is mainly in Kosovo, against Serbian armour, transport, communications, troop concentrations and headquarters facilities. Such targets are difficult to locate and for air crews are extremely professionally challenging. The key will be the will to sustain those operations and maintain the offensive.

The United States, to its credit, is calling up its air reserves. I wish that we had more. The Opposition have argued for them for long enough. I wish that we had the strategic airlift capacity of the C-17s promised in the defence review but not yet ordered. They could have enabled us to take main battle tanks and heavy armour to the theatre in hours rather than weeks, but we have to fight with what we have got.

In my judgment, I perhaps differ from other hon. Members, but the best people to fight are the Kosovans themselves. It is their land that will be liberated. They know that, and they have the will. They want to see it through to regain possession of their homelands and get their families settled in peace. The history of Balkan conflict has always involved assisting people who, ethically speaking, may seem to us, in the cosiness of our armchairs, not ideal; but the Kosovo Liberation Army is the only force available to do the job. It needs to be trained, supplied and given intelligence support and all the backing that we can provide. We have the expertise to do so, and we should use it to the full.

Now that we have engaged in this war, we cannot fail. If we did fail, the consequences for our alliance and armed forces would be awful beyond measure. We have not faced such a challenge for a generation. We do not want another Suez or Dunkirk. We want the alliance to work as it was intended to, as a coalition of free, democratic nations working for a humanitarian purpose but also to create a peace that can be sustained in the longer term. This can be done only if dictators are shown not to win and if we can restore democratic principles based on self-determination to areas such as Kosovo where they have been so violently taken from the people.

7.58 pm

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I add my name to the list of Members on both sides of the House who support the military intervention in Kosovo. I say that without banging war drums, without any self-righteousness, and also without feeling any contradiction between that view and being a man of the left; however, I say it with a sense of great fear and terrible anxiety—the fear and anxiety that I felt on hearing news of murders in Vukovar, Srebrenica and Racak. I believe that it is right that we are directly involved in the terrible events that are happening in Kosovo.

I do not believe that we are engaged in an act of war against Serbia; nor do I believe that the bombing of military targets and installations in Serbian Kosovo can in itself be described as a humanitarian act. However, having the capacity to act in the face of such butchery, we are right to do so. We are right to do all that we can to stop the killing in Kosovo; we are right to take a stand.

Historical parallels are dangerous at the best of times, and no more so than in the context of the current conflict in the Balkans. However, for those who claim that the current intervention must be justified, despite the obvious fact of the killings, perhaps we can cast the moral dilemma in this way. We knew that Hitler was rounding up the Jews, placing them in camps and murdering them. We knew that, to do that, he was taking them to the camps by train. Would it not have been right to try to destroy by aerial bombardment the railway lines that led to those camps? Could a moral case be made today for not taking such action? I believe not only that it is right to act in such circumstances, but that we have a duty to act. Moreover, the people of Kosovo have the right to expect NATO to act in order to save and protect them, and those acting on behalf of NATO in the field are entitled to expect and receive the support of this House.

The questions that we must ask are not so much to do with why we are in Kosovo; I believe that we know why we are in Kosovo. Tonight, we must ask how far the Kosovan people can expect NATO to go in attempting to protect them. What are the limits that we, as a nation, should set in pursuit of our objectives? We know that those objectives now include the determination not only to stop the killing of Kosovar people, but to return the people of Kosovo to their homes.

A further fact becomes clearer every day: that without ground forces in addition to air strikes we cannot stop the killing. How are we to stop the killing when small groups

[Mr. Roger Casale]

of Serb militia go from house to house murdering and mutilating people, armed not only with Kalashnikovs but with pistols and pocket knives, and hunt down refugees in the countryside? By means of aerial bombardment, how are we to stop the systematic rape of Kosovo women? Partitioning Kosovo is perhaps an objective of Milosevic but cannot become the aim of NATO. How are we to drive Milosevic's troops and militia from the territory without the intervention of troops on the ground? If we decide to send in troops, in what circumstances shall we do so and at what human cost?

We have not found answers to those questions in today's debate, but we must at least raise the issues that may be relevant to finding answers. First, if we do not take the next step, there is a real and present danger that the killing will simply go on and on. There were 100,000 lives lost in Croatia and 250,000 were lost in Bosnia. How many hundreds of thousands of lives must be lost in Kosovo before we decide that it is no longer possible for us, on moral, pragmatic or any other grounds, to hold back the troops?

Secondly, it is now clear that Milosevic's aim is to expel the Kosovan Albanian population—90 per cent. of the total population—from the territory of Kosovo. Not to send in ground troops will be to allow that to continue. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is right to say that the relatively fortunate people who escape across the border into Albania or Macedonia do not blame their exile on NATO. Milosevic tells the refugees, "Go to NATO, they will help you," and we would do well to heed those words. However, protecting and caring for the displaced—almost the entire population of Kosovo—whether in the neighbouring countries or in our own countries, represents a massive challenge not only to our military strength but to the resourcefulness of our entire civic societies. If there are no troops, it means that we will have taken on the responsibility of caring for the Kosovan refugees of the diaspora—perhaps for many years to come.

Thirdly, the conflict in Kosovo is not only a conflict between different ethnic groups or a battle of wills between a murderous psychopath with a monopoly of power and the rest of our civilised world; in a fundamental way, the conflict in Kosovo is about ourselves, our values and the world that we have built up around us in Europe since the second world war. Milosevic's actions stand in direct contradiction to the values of freedom, equality and justice that we have built into our systems of domestic legislation and into the conduct of international relations in the modern world and which have so often inspired the left. On the threshold of the 20th century, can we allow one man on the borders of Europe to take the decision about who should live and who should die? We should not believe that we can fail in our attempt to stand up to Milosevic and break his monopoly of power and wake up to find ourselves in the same world as before.

During the past 12 months, we have incorporated the European convention on human rights into British law and celebrated the 50th anniversary of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights. At the end of this week, we shall celebrate the 50th anniversary of NATO—an organisation whose birth was induced by the determination of western powers never again to allow the ravages of fascism.

That is why we must take all necessary steps to stop Milosevic. Not to do so would be to pay too high a price, in terms not only of the Kosovan people, but of the universal values on which we have built our modern world. We must stand up to Milosevic. His actions threaten to deny post-war peace and stability in Europe; they contradict and take away the contemporary relevance of those universal values and deny their validity in the future, not only in Kosovo and in Europe, but throughout the modern world.

8.6 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): We have heard some excellent, varied and interesting contributions today, and many points have been made that I do not intend to reiterate. However, I hope to make some points that have not yet been made and to ask some questions to which all our constituents would like to understand the answers.

The Foreign Secretary said that we are not at war. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) said that that was nonsense and of course it was; if we are invading people's territory from the air, dropping bombs on people and killing them, surely that is war. If we do not think that we are at war, how can we talk about war crimes and trying people for war crimes? The Pentagon is the biggest player in this war, and one of its press releases states that the Yugoslav soldier who is being held

"is being treated as a prisoner of war (POW), and has been afforded rights as a POW under the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention of 1949."

Of course, that is relevant only if we are at war.

In 1991, when we went to war in the Gulf, I volunteered to rejoin the Army because I considered the cause to be just. I could see clear national interests, and clear political and military objectives. This time, our national interests are not in play; I think that everyone would accept that. However, I accept that there may be a humanitarian justification for going to war that does not involve our national interests. I could also see that in the cases of Rwanda, Tibet and Chechnya. I accept that there is a just cause that may require our intervention. However, I do not accept that there are clear military or political objectives. If there are, perhaps someone can explain them. I have heard them mentioned, but they have changed a great deal. The Prime Minister said that we were bombing Serbia to prevent a humanitarian disaster. That did not seem to work. Was it to prevent ethnic cleansing—an admirable aim? If it was, that does not seem to have worked. Was it to establish peace in the Balkans? If it was, that does not seem to have worked. Was it the perfectly fair aim of undermining the Milosevic regime—a pretty ghastly regime? If it was, according to John Simpson, it appears to have had the opposite effect.

Today, we read in *The Daily Telegraph* that the Prime Minister says that Milosevic must go. If that is the case, it is perfectly fair. However, if we have a clear, achievable aim, we must know how we should achieve it. Of course we all agree that we should never have started here, but, after more than a year of what appears to be failed diplomacy—indeed some suggested nine years of failed diplomacy—threats that have been made but not fulfilled and bluffs that have been called, it appears to me that we are at war. Where will it lead? I do not give the answers: I am only posing questions, but where next?

If the war is to continue, we must be pursuing clear and achievable political and military objectives. Various people have pointed out that logic dictates that we shall

have to employ ground troops. I do not want to do that and I know that President Clinton and the Prime Minister do not want to do so either, but that must be where the logic leads. Unfortunately, the biggest player on our side in this war is the United States. President Clinton has said that he will not employ ground troops and he means it, because he remembers Vietnam and knows how many troops might be sucked into an action in the Balkans. Therefore, I regret to say that ground troops might not be an option.

It is the business of the House to ask questions and, last week, I asked the Deputy Prime Minister a question. I quoted his own words back at him—namely, that the demands were reasonable, being, among other things, an autonomous Kosovo within Serbia. His response was that I should wind my neck in, lest I

"undermine the clear aims that have been set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister."—[*Official Report*, 14 April 1999; Vol. 329, c. 219.]

However, the aims are not clear: they are not clear to me, or to friends and former colleagues in the armed forces to whom I have spoken. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) asked why Kosovo should not be given autonomy if that is what is needed, but it is not up to us to determine who rules Kosovo.

Mr. Wilkinson: Self-determination.

Mr. Robathan: It is up to the people of Kosovo to determine who rules Kosovo, be they of Albanian or Serb extraction.

We must ask questions, not to undermine the armed forces, but to ensure that the United Kingdom Government pursue the right policies. There is a paradox in this war, in that former soldiers such as myself, who are occasionally accused of being somewhat bellicose, are asking the questions and expressing concern, whereas old CND hands such as the Prime Minister appear to be enthusiastic in their pursuit of war. I do not say that to score a cheap point—it is important. People who have denied the capacity of war ever to bring about a just solution are now pursuing war. People like me, who know a little about war, have questions that should be answered and it is not in any sense unpatriotic to ask those questions.

One of the questions I want to ask is about allies. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), the hon. Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) and others have talked about the KLA. I am sure that the KLA contains many Kosovar Albanian patriots, but it has a pretty dodgy record. The Foreign Secretary speaks about restoring democracy in Kosovo, but it seems to me that there has never been any democracy in Kosovo and, furthermore, the KLA is not a democratic organisation.

What other suitable allies are there? I am not sure whether Albania is a suitable ally in the pursuit of human rights and humanitarian causes; and the Tudjman regime in Croatia is, in the opinion of many, as bad as the Milosevic regime in Serbia. Does anyone remember Vitez, which was mentioned earlier? Does anyone remember the beautiful bridge in Mostar that was destroyed by Croatians who fought the Bosnian Muslims and ethnically cleansed them from the west bank of the river? Does anyone remember how, in Krajina, more than a quarter of a million Serbs were ethnically cleansed? It is interesting to note that arms and training were supplied to the Croatian forces by the United States.

That brings us to Clinton. I do not know enough about domestic politics in America to criticise President Clinton, but I shall quote what an American said to me two weeks ago. He said, "I can understand why President Clinton is doing this—it is to establish himself as a war leader after his domestic problems." [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I am only quoting what was said to me by an American, who then asked me, "Why is Mr. Blair doing it?"

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must use the right terminology in the House.

Mr. Robathan: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was quoting an American, who asked why the Prime Minister should have done what he has done.

The action we are taking is US-led, but it appears to me that the US Government do not fully understand what they are doing in the Balkans, and nor does President Clinton have much idea what he is doing. Various articles in the American press have pointed that out. I regret to say that the Prime Minister appears to be following, without questioning as he should. Neither the United States, nor Her Majesty's Government—exemplified by the Foreign Secretary's performance today—know what they are doing; nor do they know what exactly they are trying to achieve. We need to state our clear objectives and pursue them single-mindedly until they are achieved. Even though I might not agree, if those clear objectives included invading Kosovo, fair enough.

In closing, I should like to quote Bismarck. Writing about 100 years ago, he said,

"If there is ever another war in Europe, it will come out of some damned silly thing in the Balkans."

I do not say that a million people being cleared from Kosovo is a "damned silly thing", but Bismarck was right in 1914 and, regrettably, the Balkans have not changed much in the past century. We need to be careful and clear about our aims as we continue down the path that we have chosen.

8.16 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): I wanted to speak in this debate, not only because I feel strongly about the subject, but because, for the past eight years, I have watched refugees come to Hammersmith and Ealing from all parts of the former Yugoslavia. I have called for us to act before, as have hon. Members on both sides of the House, and, if we are in a mess today, it is partly because we did not act more effectively earlier.

There were 1 million refugees from the former Yugoslavia in Europe before Kosovo was even thought about. I have met people at my surgeries and visited hostels in my area to see the damage inflicted on those individuals. One can pretend, as one or two hon. Members have chosen to do today, that the horrors that are occurring are not quite as bad as has been reported. One can try to tell the woman who was raped several times that she was not really raped, or that she was not really told that she could now have a good Serb baby—although why a woman who has been raped should have a Serb baby and not a mixed-race baby is beyond my

[Mr. Clive Soley]

understanding. That is the reality and, when we talk to ethnic Albanians or see them on the television screen, we know what the war is about.

Some people have said that the situation in Kosovo is not the same as in Germany between 1939 and 1945. Some people have said that Milosevic is not Hitler. In a simple sense, they are right, but let me tell them this: the meaning behind the phrases "racial purity" and "Greater Germany" now trades under the guise of "ethnic cleansing" and "Greater Serbia". The fact that President Milosevic is now doing the ethnic cleansing faster does not mean that he was not doing it before. Ethnic cleansing done slowly is no better than ethnic cleansing done quickly. Some of the people who now wring their hands at what they see on the television set did not wring their hands enough when it was happening out of sight of the television camera, which is why they feel discomfited about what is happening now. We are not doing the best we can in the circumstances; we are taking the least worst option. That is what this action is about. We cannot afford to let evil triumph.

I did not expect this action to be quick, easy or clean, but I did expect the Serbs to become more nationalistic. Part of the problem of Serbia is that it is locked into Balkan history, whereby history is not learned, but relived. We have seen the same problem, on a far smaller scale, in Northern Ireland, where people prefer to relive their history rather than to learn from it. People say that we shall never change the Balkans and that the people there will go on killing each other, but I remember the same sort of thing being said to me back in 1979, when I became involved in the politics of Northern Ireland. I was told, "Don't bother, Clive. They'll always go on killing each other, because it's the only language they understand." Well, we did get involved in Northern Ireland and we did something about it, and we need to do something about Kosovo now, because the situation is unacceptable.

What are the alternatives? The hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) put his finger on the one option that might work in the short term, which is to arm and train the Albanians. Such action worked once before, when we armed and trained the Croats. That was done at terrible cost to Serbia, for it produced several hundred thousand Serbian refugees, many of whom were raped—and, yes, I agree that Tudjman ought to be tried as a war criminal. That solution worked in respect of the Croats and it might work in Kosovo. However, we must think through the consequences. It would make Greece very vulnerable, and we all know that Greece would not allow the development of a Greater Albania in those terms. It is in our national interest to sort out this mess.

Several of my hon. Friends claim that we should talk some more; we have been talking for eight years. They say that we must bring in the United Nations; but we have done that. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is not in the Chamber. He said that we can forget or not hear things. Have people forgotten that the United Nations was involved? Have they forgotten the photograph of the soldier from Ghana who was chained to a post with his rifle taken from him? Do they remember the Canadian, British and Swedish troops who were locked up?

Of course Milosevic wants the United Nations involved again. However, we have learned that the United Nations—which I dearly love and want to see successful—cannot succeed unless it is reformed to deal with this sort of crisis. The reality is that we need a clear and enforceable military strategy. If I thought that the United Nations was a real option, I would go down that road like a shot.

I accept that some form of land occupation may be necessary. I am not sure whether that is the complete picture or only part of it—we are all at a disadvantage in this regard, because the matter requires military planning. Some form of land involvement—ideally, it would have the co-operation or at least the acceptance of the Milosevic Government—would be the best option. However, there are other alternatives which I hope are being explored.

Russia's role is crucial. Russia has moved on from its initial reaction of shock and horror and become more involved in the crisis. It recognises that it is part of the solution. It is in our interests to ensure that Russia is involved, because we do not want nationalism to develop in that country or to see it withdraw support from the new world order which has emerged following the collapse of the cold war. Russia needs to adopt some concept of international law that prohibits activities such as ethnic cleansing. After all, the Russian people suffered, perhaps more than any other peoples, as a result of ethnic cleansing in the 1940s.

We must assure the Russians that we are not against the Serbs. I have more Serbs in my constituency than probably any other hon. Member. I have talked to my Serb constituents—who have become more nationalistic—and told them over and over again that I admire those Germans, such as Willy Brandt, who stood up and said, "My country is wrong." Such people could hold their heads up high, and I want my Serb constituents to do the same.

Some Serbs think it is terrible that Britain should attack them when we helped them fight the Germans in the second world war. I tell them that we fought the Germans not because they were Germans, but because they were in the grip of a regime that was into ethnic cleansing with a vengeance. We supported the Serbs because they were the victims of that policy. The boot is now on the other foot and we are on different sides in this dispute.

We must recognise that we are moving into a different world. This war is not about oil or any of the other issues that have been alleged from time to time: it is an humanitarian war. The world is not prepared to live in the 21st century according to the appalling standards of the 20th century. Some of my colleagues have said that we should put Pinochet and others on trial and whip them away. I want that, too. However, I want also to deal with this situation because the 21st century must not be dominated by tinpot dictators such as Milosevic. We must prevent such people from gaining power and, if they are in power, we must use whatever measures are at our disposal to remove them. Ultimately, they must be put on trial. There must be no double standards in this respect.

Some people have suggested that a double standard operates because NATO is not bombing Turkey because of the Kurds or China because of Tibet. During a period of rapid and dramatic change, there are bound to be double standards. I urge people to visit Westminster Hall and to look at the plaques in the floor. They should read about that period which was a watershed in political history not just in Britain, but in Europe and the rest of the world. Of course, there were double standards in those trials, but a concept of the rule of law was evolving separate from politics. That is our challenge for the 21st century and that is why the United Nations must be reformed.

We are obviously at war on one level and some hon. Members have complained this afternoon that we have not said so. I understand why we choose not to say that we are at war: it benefits both the Serbs and us if our ambassadors remain in each country. We must keep the channels of communication open. However, if one is on the receiving end, it is a war by any definition.

Following the cold war, different behaviour has emerged whereby groups and regions have tried to sort out particular problems, leading to inconsistencies and double standards. However, I know where I stand when I talk to people who have been involved in such disputes for eight years—which is two to three years longer than the duration of the second world war. I am on their side—and some of them are Serbs. We must understand that crucial point. There is nothing in Serbian culture or history—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his 10 minutes.

8.26 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): We have just heard an emotional and powerful speech from the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley). However, I fear that it—and particularly his remarks about the actions and aims of the United Nations protection force—is based on rather woolly thinking. UNPROFOR had to meet limited political objectives using limited military resources. Ministers have been victims of the same emotional, woolly thinking that the hon. Gentleman has demonstrated.

We are in a mess, as are our international allies. Like every hon. Member, I want us to extricate ourselves successfully from this mess with NATO intact, and I support the fulfilment of the Government's objectives. However, we cannot escape the fact that the past four weeks have been an unmitigated disaster. In the words of a previous Foreign Secretary, the results of the air strikes have been "appalling". We knew what the consequences of our actions would be. On 25 January, the Italian Prime Minister warned the Secretary-General of NATO that, if air strikes were carried out in isolation, Italy would face a flood of Albanian refugees.

British Ministers told us that Milosevic was ready either to begin a spring campaign of ethnic cleansing or to take advantage of NATO air strikes. That offensive started after the monitors left, and they left because we intended to commence air strikes. That suggests that Milosevic took advantage of NATO's plans. Nothing can gainsay the conclusion that we knew what would happen when the air strikes began.

The Prime Minister came to the House before the bombing started and told us that our objectives were to prevent a humanitarian disaster from occurring, to contain the conflict and to make good our promises to the Kosovar people. The Secretary of State for Defence will remember describing to the Select Committee on Defence the military strategy to fulfil those objectives. He said:

"Our military objective—our clear, simple, military objective—will be to reduce the Serbs' capability to repress the Albanian population and thus to avert a humanitarian disaster."

I simply do not understand how he can have said that. The result has not been a humanitarian disaster; it has been a catastrophe.

The objective of containment has not been met. There are crises in Macedonia, Greece and Albania. The consequences are evident here, too. On Friday, I spent a mere two hours on the parliamentary police scheme with a police patrol on the M11 and I saw four Albanian refugees escorted from the back of a lorry. I then met a constituent at my parliamentary surgery that evening who had seen six Kosovar refugees getting out of a lorry. Clearly, the situation affects us as it affects the whole of Europe.

It is specious, to say the least, of the Foreign Secretary to hide behind the Kosovars' wish for the NATO bombing campaign to continue. Every Kosovar whom I have met wants a ground intervention. That view was unanimously endorsed at a meeting of Kosovars and others that I attended in the Grand Committee Room before Easter. The Kosovars want NATO to win, as I do, but how did we allow ourselves to pursue a military strategy that has so far fallen so disastrously short of achieving its objectives?

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunt: No, I do not have much time.

The sad truth is that the consequences of our military action were predicted and predictable. The Defence Secretary has made it clear that he was acting on the advice of the Chief of the Defence Staff, who has enthusiastically made the case for the current strategy in articles and at daily press conferences. However, I have not found a serious analyst who believes that our military strategy will achieve its original aim. It was an irresponsible gamble, with horrendous, immediate humanitarian consequences for the Kosovar people. There has been a dreadful failure in the political-military relationship in this country and in NATO as a whole. The failure in Britain is particularly unfortunate.

The Clinton White House has attempted such a strategy before against the Pentagon's advice, as it has on this occasion against the advice of General Shelton. The previous Government were able to deflect the US from the strategy of lift and strike. We had to put up with critics, not least the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). We knew the difficulties and consequences of the air-only option, and we were not prepared to put in the necessary ground forces to fight to ensure that we could continue that strategy to the end.

[Mr. Blunt]

The current options for action have been under consideration for some time. On 6 March 1998, the Contact Group said in a statement:

"In the light of the deplorable violence in Kosovo, we feel compelled to take steps to demonstrate to the authorities in Belgrade that they cannot defy international standards without facing severe consequences."

Last year, the ground option was analysed and, because of the difficulties involved, buried by politicians.

I accept that the ground option involves horrendous difficulties: the numbers of troops required; the time that it will take to assemble the forces; the ground on which they will have to fight; the infrastructure that will have to built to support the invasion force, as well as the difficulties connected with the conduct of the campaign. However, I share the views of Haris Silajdzic on the likelihood of significant Serbian resistance, rather than those of some of my hon. Friends who believe that the Serbs will go on fighting for ever.

The Government and our allies faced a hard choice. They funked it, chose what could be described as the third way and hoped that their military strategy would work. They continue to hope, but there is no reason to hope and no expectation that the strategy will work. I would call it the "wing and a prayer" strategy. NATO officials sound shriller and shriller as they say, "We shall prevail." They do not convince me; they do not convince my mentor, John Keegan, who taught me at Sandhurst, and they certainly do not convince President Milosevic.

Our military leaders should have pointed out the consequences of their strategy. As the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) pointed out, the Chief of the Defence Staff has failed in his responsibilities, not least because of the enthusiastic position that he has taken on the merits of the current strategy. I worked with him when he was the Chief of the General Staff and I liked him, but in a war one cannot continue with a failing strategy. We must have the courage to face up to the difficulties of achieving our objectives and start to argue with our allies for our aims. Our allies must share the burden necessary to achieve our shared objectives.

Our objective now seems to be the liberation of Kosovo to allow its population the right of self-determination. Our objective should not be the replacement of Milosevic—that is a matter for the Serbian people—but we should prepare for that objective on our own terms and in our own time. It may take a year before we are in a position to cross the starting line—next spring, when we are ready—but, if we can find the will, the view from Belgrade will immediately change. The leaders in Belgrade will know that they will lose Kosovo. If they are to retain any interest in Kosovo, it will be in their interests to come to the negotiating table. The lesson is that we shall not will the end if we are not prepared to will the means.

8.35 pm

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) is absolutely right: we have been paying, and will continue to pay, an extremely high price for appeasing President Milosevic for far too long.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) took to task those of us who personalise this matter. His comment might have carried a little more strength if, in the very same breath, he had not himself personalised it by naming President Clinton and Tony Blair as those most responsible for this conflict—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Member that he must use the correct terminology.

Mr. Bradshaw: I am sorry; I should have said the Prime Minister.

The recent history of the former Yugoslavia has not been black and white; atrocities have been committed by all sides. Yes, the ethnic cleansing of Krajina Serbs by Croats was wrong, but two—or many—wrongs do not make a right. Sometimes, in these situations, we must ask who started the conflict and whose motives and behaviour have been primarily responsible for it.

Those of us who have followed matters in the Balkans closely always knew that Kosovo would be the most dangerous flashpoint. From the moment Milosevic stripped the province of its autonomy and embarked on a state policy of repression of its 90 per cent. ethnic Albanian population, we knew that much worse was to come. For well over a year now, that policy has included ethnic cleansing, murder and terror. Kosovo may have featured only on some hon. Members' radar screens once the NATO action began, but Milosevic's terror has been going on for years.

To give this Government and the international community some credit, we moved with a great deal more urgency than in the Bosnia crisis, when it took five years, and ultimately bombs, before a peace was secured.

In an otherwise excellent speech, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) said that the single stain on the record was our failure to use the Russians to deliver the Serbs. The truth is that the Serbs were not deliverable. The Russians tried, for heaven's sake. The Russians were in the Contact Group; the Russians were as frustrated as we were that Milosevic would not see sense. Despite Milosevic breaking agreement after agreement, we and the Kosovars continued to negotiate in good faith right up to the Rambouillet talks—while Milosevic was building up his forces for a final solution.

Those who say that the international community should have built up its ground forces and foreseen the scale of the refugee crisis do so with the benefit of hindsight. No one could have foreseen the scale of the Serb assault on Kosovo. And, if we had built up our forces during the Rambouillet talks, what propaganda mileage that would have given Milosevic to accuse us of negotiating in bad faith.

The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) described the operation as United States-led. He is so wrong. The unity of the 19 NATO nations has been far stronger than many of us expected. That unity, and the public support in those democratic nations for the campaign, have increased as the conflict has gone on.

Those who say that the bombing has accelerated ethnic cleansing might be right, but they do not offer an alternative and ignore the fact that ethnic cleansing was going on anyway, and would have continued. Why do the critics never listen to the Kosovars themselves? Not a single refugee of the tens of thousands arriving in camps

in Albania and Macedonia has said that they want the bombing to stop—not one. On the contrary, they see NATO as their only salvation. Even those whose relatives may have been killed last week by a NATO mistake say that they want the campaign to continue and intensify.

I hope that the Prime Minister is right when he says that the bombing is having its desired effect, but degrading Milosevic's ability to repress his own people can no longer be the sole limit of our ambition. That ambition must be the safe return of every Kosovar who has been driven from their home, in long-term peace and security. It must also be to try before the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague all those—right to the top—who are guilty of gross violations of international law. Not to see that through would be to capitulate to genocide in Europe 50 years after we vowed that it would never happen again. That is unacceptable to the British people and to those of the 18 other democracies that are fighting with us. The credibility of NATO, the guarantor of peace and security in Europe, would be in tatters, and we would give a green light to despots anywhere that they may murder, rape and pillage with impunity.

The Prime Minister has said that we must finish the job. Indeed we must, even if that means using ground troops to do so. I share the viewpoint of my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) that it was a mistake to rule out using ground troops when the bombing started. It cannot make sense to reveal one's hand to one's opponent at the start. However, I can understand why it was done. There was nervousness about what public opinion would stomach. But surely it is now obvious in this country, in America and in most of our allied countries that we underestimated our people's resolve.

On Saturday, canvassing in Exeter for the local elections, I asked every person that I met about the campaign, and I did not find a single one against it. One young man ran up to me and said, "Please tell Tony Blair we need ground troops in Kosovo now." Now may not be feasible—it may well make sense to destroy the Serb military infrastructure some more first—but we must at least now start to prepare for that possibility. Summer in the Balkans is very short.

As a former BBC correspondent, I conclude by saying something about the discussion on the media in this war. In a recent newspaper editorial, I was accused of doing the Government's dirty work in leading the charge against the BBC. Let me tell the House, nobody tells me what to do or say, especially about a former employer of mine, and I wish to place on the record the fact that I happen to think that the BBC has done an exemplary job of covering this war.

However, I made two limited and specific criticisms. The first was of the shortage of health warnings on reports from Belgrade at the start of the campaign. It is vital that listeners and viewers are reminded of the restrictions under which journalists operate in the Serb capital—in particular, the fact that there is no free access to Kosovo, which means that Serb action there goes unreported. Perhaps if my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) had been escorted to Kosovo by her Serb friends, her account might have had more credibility.

My second criticism is of senior BBC correspondents having regular columns in newspapers. That was prompted by John Simpson's piece in the *Sunday Telegraph* in the first week of the campaign, under the headline,

"Why this war isn't working".

It was always a rule at the BBC that correspondents did not write opinionated pieces for the newspapers because that damaged their impartiality and credibility in doing the job that the licence fee payers pay them to do for the BBC. That policy was good for the BBC. It was in the interests of robust, independent public service broadcasting. If that policy has changed, the BBC should tell us.

The BBC built its international reputation in the second world war, quite rightly, because it—almost uniquely among the world's broadcasters—reported our mistakes and defeats as well as our victories. Long may that continue. But let us never forget that in Belgrade, independent journalists are shot.

It is for those values of free speech, democracy and pluralism, of which the House and the country should be very proud, that our brave service men and women are now fighting.

8.43 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. It is the first time that I have said anything about Kosovo, and I do so having spent a great deal of time—as have many colleagues from both sides of the House—talking to constituents on the subject, and listening to unprompted conversations.

I shall not take the House through the horror stories that have befallen the Kosovar Albanians, indulge in rhetoric about fascism or point out similarities with Hitler, not because many of those arguments are not well founded but because they have been made, far more fluently than I could make them.

I shall not speak about the tragedy of errors leading to civilian casualties in Serbia, but I do argue, as did the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), that it is essential that NATO is clear and honest about whatever has happened—I understand that it made some statements this afternoon—because if there is a feeling, as there has been in the past few days, that the truth is not being told, the media strategy of NATO is seen to move closer to that of the Serbians, and that is obviously unacceptable. Involving Alastair Campbell in NATO's media campaign does nothing to enhance its credibility.

I wholly support the need for our involvement in Kosovo. I go further than I know that some of my hon. Friends do. I agreed with the Prime Minister when he said last week that there was a humanitarian aspect that we could not ignore. In the modern world, with modern communications, we should not stand aside and watch atrocities take place, but I accept that there is hypocrisy. We can all point to examples where we have not become involved. However, that does not necessarily mean never becoming involved. I agree with those who think that we let things go on for too long in Bosnia. I tried from behind the scenes, but failed, to alter the stance of the then Government.

[Mr. James Paice]

I do not doubt the Prime Minister's desire to achieve a satisfactory conclusion but I have serious doubts about the way he has gone about it. Before any involvement should take place, it is essential to examine all the eventualities. There should be an objective, an exit strategy and the forces to achieve the objective. It is becoming clear that the Government and the United States Government did none of these things adequately.

I do not doubt also that the Government are wholehearted in their desires, but they have been half-hearted in the execution of their strategy to achieve those desires. At the outset, both the Government and President Clinton said that there would be no ground troops. I believe that that was said on the basis of what they thought public opinion would accept. I believe also that Governments should lead public opinion, not follow it. The announcement from day one that there would be no ground troops gave a clear message to Milosevic to hurry up with his programme of ethnic cleansing before things became too difficult.

Mr. Savidge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: No, I am not giving way. The hon. Gentleman should have learned by now that virtually no one gives way when speeches are restricted to 10 minutes.

I have little doubt that Milosevic's plans had been made. The atrocities had started before the air attacks. I have little doubt also that the speed of the expulsions and atrocities, with the resulting chaos in the border countries, is a result of our bombardment. It is entirely right, of course, to say that the crime of ethnic cleansing is the same whether it takes place quickly or slowly. However, the problem of resolving the refugee situation, which the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) described, has been exacerbated because of the speed of the expulsions. As I have said, I believe that that has been the result of the bombing campaign, which is a bombing campaign on its own. It is not that we should not have done it, but we should not have pretended that we could get away with only a bombing campaign.

Shortly before the Easter recess the Secretary of State for Defence said that he could not give details of any of our tactics. That is right. We all understand that. However, why did the Government do so in spades with regard to ground troops? The Serbian Government know full well of all the difficulties that would face us. They know also of the reluctance that we would face in committing ground troops. However, for all the reasons that have been described, ruling out the use of ground troops from day one was a clear message to the Serbs to get on with their evil plans. Their use should have been left as an option and preparations should have been set in train. A month has elapsed during which preparations could have been well advanced. It may be that they are now advanced, and I am not necessarily asking to be assured or otherwise, but I think that it is an important point.

Ministers keep telling us that their military advisers say that air strikes alone will be sufficient. If they are saying that, they seem to be the only people who take that view. Even now, after four weeks, there is little sign of any step down by Milosevic. I do not believe that there will be, at least until Kosovo is cleared of Albanians. When that is the position, he may make some overtures.

So what now? In my view Rambouillet is entirely dead. Whatever the Prime Minister thinks, bearing in mind what he said last week, if he really wants the Albanians to return to Kosovo, I cannot conceive that they will do so now if Kosovo remains in any way Serbian. So the rest of the world, and in the context of the debate, the Government, must decide what the options are. There seem to be three. The first is to stop the bombing on some pretext once Milosevic has achieved his aims. That is not a real option and it would achieve nothing. Almost certainly it could lead to the end of NATO.

The second option is partition. I was astonished that the Prime Minister ruled it out so categorically last week, not because I like it—I do not—but because it may be the only option that can be achieved. It may not be sustainable, given the need for military force to maintain it, but it was unwise to rule it out at this stage.

The third option is some form of independent Kosovo, which, again, is by no means perfect. Kosovo's size and it remaining independent are problems, and this option ignores the importance of Kosovo to Serbia and the historic sense of linkage, which is the cause of so much of the conflict.

In the immediate future, we have only one real option—to win. Whatever the niceties of a declaration of war may be, they are technicalities which the ordinary men and women we represent do not understand. However, they understand that, if we start something such as this, we must commit all the forces necessary to achieve the victory that we set out to achieve.

We now read that President Clinton wants Milosevic himself to fall and, unsurprisingly, our Prime Minister appears to have followed suit. Is that one of our new objectives or not? That is yet another example of change; the crucial point is that the confusion over objectives and ground troops gives comfort to our opponents and creates uncertainty among our supporters. The Foreign Secretary said today that our objectives remain as they were, but he then said that Rambouillet was clearly not enough. At the outset, he and the Prime Minister were saying that the Rambouillet framework was our objective.

Frequently the Government have made specific statements—on ground troops, partition and many other subjects—and boxed themselves completely into a corner. This is not a reflection on the Government, but the reality is that we will almost certainly have to follow suit if the American Government decide that they will put ground troops in or will accept partition. Our Government will have to swallow their words.

No one can have failed to be moved by the sights that we have seen and the stories that we have heard. No words can adequately describe Milosevic and his morality, but simply removing him alone from power would not negate the actions of hundreds or thousands Serbian soldiers, police and militia. How many years will have to elapse before there is again any sense of trust between the Albanians and Serbians?

Our service men deserve our support, and they have it. They also deserve clarity of political purpose and the resources to enable them to fulfil their role. They have not had that. Ruling out the use of ground troops was a massive error of judgment. Launching air attacks in a low-key way—today, the Foreign Secretary said that their scale has more than doubled—did not convince Milosevic that we were serious about our purpose. If the attacks are

beginning to work, as the Foreign Secretary has led us to believe, it is too late. The expulsions are almost complete and the acceptable outcomes—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time.

8.53 pm

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): The crisis in Kosovo raises a number of profound questions. We have had a good debate in the House this evening and heard a variety of views on this difficult and controversial issue. One profound question raised by the crisis is, what circumstances in the modern world justify military action?

There may be a variety of answers to that question. One is that there are no such circumstances—the pacifist position; I have reason to respect it, but that is not my own position. A predominant view is that the national interest determines military action. Many Members of the House would take that view. The national interest can include many factors, from the defence of the realm and of these shores to economic or commercial interests—not least oil, in the modern world.

I want to challenge the view that a narrow definition of national interest is helpful in determining Britain's role in the world. We live in a new world. Following the end of the cold war, we cannot be relaxed about nuclear weaponry and many nuclear-armed nations have planet-destroying capability.

Nevertheless, many of the conflicts that we now face are of a different order. We live in a world where geopolitical disputes have always occurred, often ethnic in origin and atrocious in execution. Rwanda is a major example from Africa, and former Yugoslavia is a key example close by in Europe. We live in a world where sophisticated international media bring atrocities, through our television screens and printed media, into our living rooms to shock us as we eat our television suppers.

We also live in a world where, not least because of the media, a humanitarian response is developing among the public, summed up in the phrase, "Something must be done". While many use that phrase pejoratively, it is an expression of civil decency. That opinion is belittled by some military experts and patronised by some conventional politicians, but it is the majority view of our constituents. It is a view that overrides the conventional definition of national interest, but it is right that in Kosovo something must be done.

Politically, this issue is confusing. We have seen that in the House today, with many of us on the left appearing more enthusiastic about intervention than those on the right. This new world involves new and confusing politics, not least for the left. We now talk about Kosovo, but not long ago we talked about Bosnia. As a new Member in the previous Parliament in 1992, I was shocked by what I took to be the majority view of both sides of the House that we should be extremely cautious about intervention. The view was that, at best, we should go easy and, at worst, do nothing. The Foreign Office was led by the key appeasers.

I grew up in post-war Britain, and found it difficult to understand the appeasement of Nazi Germany that had taken place in the 1930s. It was only when I heard debates about Bosnia in this House in the early 1990s that I started to understand the appeasement of the 1930s. In a parliamentary Session in the early 1990s, I visited Sarajevo—not at the height of the conflict, but nevertheless when the city was being shelled. I was there for just two or three days. Talking to people in Bosnia and Sarajevo helped me to understand what it was like to live in that civilised, cosmopolitan city surrounded by mountains from which Serb soldiers could look down the rifle sights of their sophisticated weaponry and decide which old lady, child or woman to kill that day.

In Bosnia, ethnic cleansing gave us a vile new vocabulary to add to the lexicon of international relations. The situation in Kosovo bears comparison, but is a more extreme case. However, no one could foresee or predict the scale of the tragedy of recent weeks. No one in the House would argue about that.

I strongly support the Government's commitment to NATO action. I am aware of the complexity and difficulties, not least for our armed services, but I can think of no other policy of this Government that I support so wholeheartedly. It is difficult, because in recent years the public have come to expect short wars. They have been seduced by smart weapons and quick results. We are seeing things rather differently now. Old-fashioned weather—the wrong kind—is supposedly inhibiting high-tech weaponry. We are seeing slow progress, mistakes and terrible casualties. We are also seeing the difficulties of waging military action in the media spotlight. We must be sophisticated about that, not least in terms of our own actions and words. How do free democracies fight a war in public against a tyranny that censors its media, locks up its opponents and assassinates a key newspaper editor? I would be the first to defend those in the House who speak against the war, but they have a duty to think how their words will be replayed in Belgrade and about the comfort that they will bring to the perpetrators of aggression and atrocity.

I am no military expert—and, a few weeks into a war, I will not pretend to be one—but I believe that the use of ground troops will be necessary. We need an army in Kosovo. Milosevic must have no veto over that decision. I suspect, although I am no expert, that Kosovo should become a UN protectorate. I suspect that, one day, it may have to become an independent nation.

We must put more energy into the International War Crimes Tribunal. I do not minimise the difficulty of arresting Dr. Karadzic and General Mladic but had they been tried by now, things may have been rather different. Although we are aware of extravagant language, it is a decent use of English to say that Dr. Karadzic and President Milosevic are war criminals and should be tried.

Former Yugoslavia must somehow summon up the energy soon—like the rest of us—to enter the new millennium. It does so in the worst possible circumstances. For Europe, the 20th century was stained in its midst by Nazi genocide. Despite the caution of my colleagues, it is appropriate to say that the century is ending with genocide in Bosnia—we remember Srebrenica particularly—and genocide and the ethnic killing of young and old in Kosovo.

Do we say that there is no national interest? Our boundaries are not threatened, and no profits are at stake, but I believe that the people of Britain and the wider democratic world will not tolerate the slaughter of the men of Kosovo; the organised rape of its women and girls; the uprooting and terrorising of its elders; and the attempted expulsion of an entire people by military might.

[Mr. Malcolm Wicks]

Some may attack the idea as fanciful and innocent, but I say that action on the grounds of "Something must be done" is a modern, decent national interest. Something must be done—and this House is right to support the Government in trying to do it.

9.2 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I wish to concentrate on two of the war aims enunciated by the Foreign Secretary this afternoon. The first—as has been reiterated many times by the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister—is to return the refugees to their homes. I wish to examine the implications of that war aim. The second was not mentioned by the Foreign Secretary today, but has been mentioned briefly by the Prime Minister; to return stability to the whole region. That matter has not been dwelt on in this debate.

The hon. Members for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) referred to the terrible plight of the refugees in neighbouring countries to Kosovo. The camps in Macedonia, for instance—which were put up so brilliantly and so quickly by the British Army—have serious problems. There is no adequate sanitation, schooling or health provision. They are no places for any refugee to stay for a long time.

We have been told this afternoon that the war will go on for much longer, so we must look at how we provide properly for those refugees and how we make certain that we have sufficient provision for them. I have been trying to find out the number of refugees with whom we will be dealing. My inquiries have met with varied results. I have been told that about 500,000 refugees are spread between Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro. Those are the main areas in which the current refugees are to be found.

Those people are crossing the borders in ever-increasing numbers, and the longer the war continues, the larger the numbers will be. The population of Kosovo is approximately 2 million, 90 per cent. of whom are Albanian Muslims, Kosovans or Illyrians—as they would call themselves in some of their more historical reminiscences about their origins. If all those people are to be "cleansed", horribly as it may be, we shall be dealing with a much larger refugee problem than I think the international community has even begun to contemplate.

Certainly, the amount of money that we have contributed is insufficient to deal with the problem. I understand from ministerial statements that we have contributed £20 million, £10 million of which will come from the emergency provisions of the Department for International Development and £10 million from a source that the Prime Minister did not name to us. I hope that that money will not come from the budget of the Department for International Development; if that is the case, the question of our attacking poverty will rise. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will tell us where the money will come from when he winds up the debate.

There has been talk of a further £7 million, making a total of £27 million. There are also our contributions to the UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross and UNICEF, and to the European Union fund, so the total is actually much greater than the public imagine. Nevertheless, it is not enough to enable us to deal with the refugee problem that we shall face over a long period. We shall have to establish whole villages, which are likely to comprise more than 1 million people and which will need to be provided with proper sanitation, proper housing and shelter, schools and numerous services for women and children who have been parted from their families. There will need to be services to deal with the trauma that people will have experienced, as well as food and medical supplies. Nothing like that level of provision has been contemplated by the country, by the House or, indeed, by the international community, but I think that we must plan for it.

The war aim is to return the refugees to their homes in Kosovo after, say, six or nine months, but what does that mean? Their homes have been incinerated: they have been destroyed. We in NATO are busily destroying the infrastructure that controlled those homes, on the basis that those are military targets that we are entitled to bomb: roads, bridges, fuel supplies, water supplies and sanitation. People are not going to return. Refugees who have been established, properly, in camps of which we can be proud are not going to return to conditions in which they have not the basic elements enabling them to live—including food: they will not have been able to plant crops or produce any kind of harvest for the next year. We must provide those people with food, housing, and all the infrastructure into the bargain.

Given our objectives and the opportunities that exist, a huge problem lies ahead of us. Meanwhile, we are destroying the Serbian infrastructure. There are already 600,000 refugees in Serbia who have come from Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and who need help of the kind that is given to refugees. Our bombing is making many more people homeless, and giving them refugee status. If we are to pursue this war to its conclusion—which is demonstrated by a single objective—we must make provision for the Serb refugees and the homeless in Serbia who will be destitute, without jobs, food or shelter. We cannot ignore their problems. If we are to provide a stable regime for the rest of the region, we cannot allow the stationing in small countries of a number of refugees that would upset the ethnic balance in those countries.

Moreover, we cannot treat refugees better—give them better housing, better food, better shelter and better medical facilities—than the people who live in Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania. We have a massive problem with which to deal in those countries. We need to make provision for it now. We need to alert all the international agencies, particularly the UNHCR, to that great problem.

With the massive number of minorities and refugees in those countries, stability is not likely, particularly if we have to introduce troops to defend refugees whom we return to Kosovo. They will not return unless they feel that they will not be attacked again.

Therefore, the question is: how are we to provide that security? Is it to be through an international protectorate, sniped at by the Serbs? We know what their capacity is for guerrilla warfare. They will not accept an international protectorate in that area, particularly if it is not supported by the UN; I understand that it may not be. The protectorate may be imposed by NATO, which is the wrong way in which to approach the problem. We need to have UN and Russian support. Indeed, we have to go

for a negotiated settlement with the help of Russia and the UN to stop the crisis developing to a degree where we cannot deal with it either financially or logistically.

9.11 pm

Ms Tess Kingham (Gloucester): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to what is an important debate.

There is no doubt that the plight of the Kosovar refugees has hit to the very heart of the British people, who have responded with characteristic generosity to the disturbing scenes of streams of Kosovars driven from their homes, fleeing with few provisions across the borders into camps in Macedonia and Albania. In my own city of Gloucester, the public responded swiftly, establishing collection points in the city centre for clothing, blankets and children's toys. Over the past few weeks, as a result of that, I have spoken to hundreds of people in my city. The overwhelming response to the NATO campaign has been, "It's about time. Milosevic has had enough time to negotiate over many years. It's about time the international community acted."

As someone who spent most of her working life before being elected working in international aid agencies, often communicating the aftermath of war, I find myself in the unusual position of agreeing with that view. I strongly believe that the suffering of the Kosovar Albanian families will cease in the long term only if Milosevic's war machine is stopped now and if the NATO campaign does not cease until his military capability has finally been completely crushed. If the international community had dealt with Milosevic and his systematic campaigns of ethnic cleansing in that way almost a decade ago, we would not be witnessing yet again mass atrocities almost on our borders.

I became active in party politics quite late on and primarily as a result of my experience working in the international aid sector. Personally, I grew increasingly frustrated with lobbying politicians for action. I thought that I should like to play a more direct part in trying to influence political decisions. Certain international events during my career crystallised my thinking—indeed, it changed it—on military intervention, in particular, the tragedies in Bosnia and Rwanda.

I remember clearly in 1994 the aid agencies and people on the ground warning politicians throughout the world that genocide was being planned in Rwanda. As in most cases of genocide, the Rwandan genocide was not spontaneous. It was not just an ethnic tribal conflict. The genocide was strategic, clinical and totally predictable.

I madly lobbied politicians to increase the UN presence in Rwanda and to get the UN to intervene to prevent the genocide, not just to stand by as a passive witness. It was a sad, frustrating and depressing experience. While politicians pontificated, the Rwandan massacres took place under their noses. Instead of intervening, the UN pulled out.

To our eternal shame, almost 1 million people were slaughtered under the noses of the inactive international community. We failed the Rwandan people and then the people of Bosnia too. The reports of death camps, mass executions and systematic massacres there in the early 1990s gradually exposed the situation. Then, too, there were cries that the reports might be exaggerated and should be a bit more evenhanded. After the event, when the mass graves were uncovered, it emerged that the truth was much worse than many of the reports.

I remember the frustration that many of us felt that the world had waited too long to act. In both those cases, arguments were advanced about national sovereignty and the rights of the nation state, but we had a responsibility as an international community and as signatories to the UN convention on genocide to prevent genocide wherever possible; we did not. In any case, the survivors of the Rwandan genocide did not care whose remit it was, or about the dot or comma of international law: they wanted action and they wanted their families saved from the massacres. For the sake of basic humanity, the genocide in Rwanda should have been stopped.

I feel the same sense of frustration now as a Member of Parliament, seeing the plans for genocide—I make no apology for using that word—unfold in Kosovo. I do not like war—I have seen its effects at first hand—but I am pleased and relieved that the Labour Government are not turning away from Kosovo and finding excuses not to act. We are acting now to prevent genocide and not to have the shame of standing by and prevaricating while hundreds of thousands of people are systematically ethnically cleansed. That is a brave decision and it is morally correct.

So far, either beforehand or this evening, I have not heard any convincing alternative to NATO's actions that would have protected the Kosovar Albanians. I have heard plenty of reasons—and felt a sense of déjà vu—why NATO should not intervene, but no credible, practical alternatives from those opposing the NATO actions. Some hon. Members have argued that the UN should be the lead force in the intervention and that we need more negotiations with Milosevic. If we expected the UN to arrive on a white charger to save the Kosovar Albanians from genocide, we would have had a long wait. We all know that the UN would never have intervened in Kosovo because of the veto system in the Security Council.

Last year, I was part of a delegation from the Select Committee on International Development to the Secretary-General and the UN head of peacekeeping. I asked both of them what the ultimate sanctions applied to any party in a conflict who did not abide by UN resolutions would be. I was thinking not of Kosovo at the time, but of Angola and Western Sahara. It was made clear to me that any wait for UN intervention would be a very long one, that there was no political will around the world to intervene, and that the ultimate sanction the UN had was to pull out.

I remember commenting to colleagues on the delegation that that was a charter for any expansionist dictator to invade anywhere, commit atrocities, have a few UN resolutions slapped at him, sit tight for a few years and the UN would pull out. Sadly, the UN would not have prevented genocide in Kosovo.

The UN must be the foundation of international law and our hope for the future, but its capabilities to intervene must be built up. We must also address the ridiculous veto system in the Security Council. That is an enormous task and the people of Kosovo could not wait for it to be completed. I have also heard it argued that we should not intervene in Kosovo because we did not do so in Rwanda or Bosnia. Surely that is the point. We did not intervene, to our eternal shame. What are we supposed to say to people in Kosovo now? "We are sorry, but you will have to wait and let genocide happen. We let a million die in Rwanda and we did not intervene in Bosnia, so it would not be fair." I do not think so.

[Ms Tess Kingham]

It is also argued that we should negotiate, but we did and for more than a year. This time Milosevic is following a characteristic pattern. We have seen it before—the clearing of villages, the burnings, the torture and the mass executions. If Milosevic accepts NATO's five-point plan, the bombings will stop. It is that simple and straightforward. We must be clear that he is enacting a strategically planned programme of ethnic cleansing. Whatever the historical perspectives, that is what he is doing—and we must remember that fact throughout this debate. More than 500,000 people have been displaced, villages have been burnt and destroyed, men taken away and shot, and women raped.

The question of rape in Kosovo clearly illustrates Milosevic's true intentions in that area and across the region. It is at the heart of his genocidal campaign. The reports of rape from women refugees are not unfamiliar to me. I had heard them from Bosnian women and read countless similar testimonies during the Bosnian war less than 10 years ago.

The rapes are not spontaneous acts of violence by an uncontrolled military. Yet again, Milosevic's forces are using rape as an act of genocide. When Serb forces rape a woman as part of an ethnic cleansing strategy, they intend to do, and succeed in doing, several things. They humiliate an Albanian. Often, they rape a woman in front of family members—fathers, brothers and sons. They destroy the fabric of the family.

The trauma is shared by the family, and the trauma is a stain on the culture of a community in which virginity before marriage is greatly prized. I have read sad reports of Albanian women in refugee camps clutching so-called rape certificates so that, when they are looking for a husband, they can prove that they were raped. Gang rape is also common, with an obvious intensification of the trauma.

The ultimate in ethnic cleansing comes when a Kosovo woman bears a Serb child. That is what the systematic campaign of genocide is about. I strongly believe that we had a moral imperative to intervene. I should not have felt happy with myself or my Government if we had sat back, yet again, while nothing happened as genocide unfolded before us. If push comes to shove, we must send in ground troops. Unless Milosevic's killing machine is stopped, and his military strength crushed, he will return, yet again, to haunt us militarily, and we will stand here in the same position in 10 years' time.

9.21 pm

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): Once again, we have had an interesting debate. Opinions have not changed much, but we have heard a good deal more frankness. Fundamental divisions remain on both sides of the House.

We have heard some excellent speeches. My hon. Friends the Members for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney), for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) and for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), have given the Government broad support. I was sorry to miss the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), but I have heard that it was a powerful endorsement of the Government's position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) dissented equally powerfully. Perhaps the best statements of dissent came from my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir P. Tapsell), who reminded us of some basic military doctrine, and from the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who was, as ever, brilliant. Whether one agrees or disagrees with him, he is always worth listening to. I hope one day to make a speech in the House that is as good as those that he always makes.

There have been several developments since last we debated Kosovo, but the atrocities continue, and there are more than 500,000 refugees, plus probably an equal number inside Kosovo. The ferocity and brutality of the Serb regime led by Milosevic continues to astound us. We still support the Government's policies to reverse the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, to regain the whole of Kosovo and to allow the refugees to return to their homes—or, in many cases I fear, to what is left of those homes. We also support our armed forces and their efforts to achieve those objectives.

It has been gratifying during the past three weeks to see the NATO alliance holding together. It appears solid, although one or two members waver slightly more than others. We are glad that the alliance has remained solid, because in its unity lies its strength.

Three weeks ago, in his statement just before Easter, the Secretary of State for Defence said that Milosevic was cowering in his bunker. In retrospect, those words appear over-optimistic. As I said at the time, I thought that the action would take longer and prove more difficult than the Government had thought. I still hold that view, and it is probably shared now by a great many other people, possibly including the Government.

The Government are right to seek to regain the whole of Kosovo. They have our support in that. But difficult questions remain, and I should like to put them to the Secretary of State. I do not expect answers—public answers—to all of them. However, I hope that the Government have thought about those questions and have their own answers.

First, let us consider the original objectives—having Milosevic sign the Rambouillet agreement, and preventing atrocities. Clearly, we have not been successful in those aims. Our objective now is to return the Albanians to Kosovo, but whether we are talking about an autonomous or independent Kosovo is not certain, and the Foreign Secretary was not entirely clear about that when he opened the debate. Neither the Albanians nor the Kosovo Liberation Army are likely to accept anything less than an independent Kosovo, and that poses grave difficulties. We would like to know how the Government intend to address the question of whether borders can be adjusted.

The Prime Minister has ruled out partition, which would in any case be seen as a failure for NATO. The Foreign Secretary said as much today. Deposing Milosevic and indicting him for war crimes would have to go together, and that would be a big extension of the mission that NATO has set itself. Would Russia stand by and not react to that?

At the heart of the story of the terrible catastrophe of the past few days have been the refugees. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells)

illustrated the simply enormous scale of the effort that would be needed to deal with the crisis. We heard heart-rending stories from the hon. Members for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). When we hear about 500,000 refugees it is hard to understand how individuals are affected, but they helped us to understand their plight.

The problem needs massive resources of food, money, people and effort. Does the Secretary of State believe that enough resources are going in? At the beginning of last week, the Macedonian Government were saying that they had received no money. I am aware that money is not the only form of help that is going in, but a poor and relatively unstable country such as Macedonia clearly needs it. Reports from Albania are of chaos. Do the Government really think that the effort is adequate? Who is in charge of it internationally or in our Government?

There have been some mistakes in the military campaign. We failed to foresee the nature and extent of the refugee crisis and underestimated the scale of military effort that would be needed to secure Milosevic's co-operation. In retrospect, it seems that we activated the bombing campaign that was planned before the Holbrooke agreement was secured last autumn. That campaign was intended to get Milosevic to negotiate, whereas now we are trying to get him to stop his activities in Kosovo, which is likely to require military action on a wholly different scale.

We clearly overestimated our ability to stop Serb action on the ground in Kosovo. We are now stepping up the campaign but it is still very difficult to deal with small army units on the ground. Our ground attack aircraft apparently still feel compelled to fly at altitudes that make their task extremely difficult. I do not know what the Secretary of State's view is—clearly, it is a subject that he may not want to discuss in public—but it would be much better if they could fly at lower altitudes. Perhaps then such difficulties as the dreadful accident that occurred last week could be avoided.

We support the Government in the view that bombing can work, but it will not achieve the objectives quickly. There must be voices in the Serb Government asking whether all this is worth it and saying that there may be room for compromise. Once that process starts, there is some hope that NATO and the Government can achieve their objectives in Kosovo, but removing Milosevic from power will require a great deal more military effort.

If we remove Milosevic, there will have to be a completely new Government in Belgrade. We should not imagine that he is a lone figure. In fact, there is considerable evidence that many of the people behind him are worse than him and have personally committed atrocities in Bosnia. If our objective is to change the whole Government in Belgrade, that is a radical extension of our mission. We would all want to put Milosevic on trial, but to set that as a war aim would be a big extension of the mission, and I am not sure that it is sensible to do that at this time.

If the bombing does not achieve the objectives fairly soon, the Government and NATO are faced with three rather unattractive options. One is a compromise, involving partition of Kosovo, which the Foreign Secretary has ruled out; another is the introduction of ground troops; and the third is the continuation of the bombing in an attrition mode, destroying more and more of Serbia. If we cannot bring the action to a swift conclusion, I hope at least that it will not drag on all summer.

To send in ground troops would be a big escalation of the conflict. We understand from the Government that there has been no change in their policy and that they do not foresee any need for one and are not planning for it. There is a lot of glib advocacy of the idea that ground troops can resolve the conflict and it is simply a question of clicking one's fingers, putting together an army of 100,000 or 150,000 and trucking them into Kosovo. That would be an enormous extension of the mission that NATO has set.

Will the Secretary of State answer the two questions posed by my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary? Have any preparations been made to assemble more ground forces in the area? Does he accept that preparations would have to be made now if there were to be a ground force that could fight its way into Kosovo this year?

Mr. Hood: When the Prime Minister first made his statement to the House, the Leader of the Opposition supported the air strikes but said clearly that he would not support ground troops. The policy of the Government and NATO at present is not to use ground troops. If that policy changes, will the Opposition support the Government and NATO?

Mr. Maples: If there is to be an enormous change of Government policy, I shall wait to hear it announced by the Prime Minister or a Secretary of State. I do not suppose that they will ask the hon. Gentleman to do it for them. As we have with everything else that the Government have said, we will consider that, but the Government have said that ground troops are not necessary and they have no proposals to introduce them. The Americans have made it clear that that is their policy. No one would dream of it without the presence of American ground troops. On that basis, we too have ruled out the use of ground troops.

There are great difficulties in getting a ground army into Kosovo that must be recognised by its advocates and by the House. Let us consider the borders of Kosovo. To go in from Hungary means going through Serbia. I suspect that Romania and Bulgaria would like to stay out of this, and their involvement would mean using a Black sea port. I cannot imagine that Croatia is keen to get involved in the conflict now that it has secured its independence. The use of Bosnian territory would risk undermining the delicate settlement there. That leaves Albania and Macedonia.

Using Macedonia would mean using a Greek port and Greek territory. The Greeks are the most pro-Serb of all the NATO nations. They have ruled out the use of their ports and territory for ground troops, as has Macedonia, although it might be easier to change the mind of the Macedonians than that of the Greeks. Even if Macedonia were used, I understand that there is only one rather narrow road into Kosovo. If we go through Albania, there is a port, but I understand that its infrastructure is rudimentary. The road from Tirana to the northern border is little more than a track and 6,000 ft mountains would have to be crossed. Those are the only two politically possible routes for getting an army into Kosovo, and

[Mr. Maples]

neither looks attractive. Those who glibly call for ground troops should tell us how they think it could be done because it would be a risky and difficult operation.

We must remember that it could be a long-term commitment. It is a question not only of how we get in but of how we get out. There are many other areas of potential conflict in the Balkans into which we could be dragged if NATO had a ground army in place.

Mr. Benn: The hon. Gentleman is identifying with great skill and clarity the available alternatives. Would he join me in saying that, at every stage, the House should be asked by the Government explicitly to support whatever the current policy happens to be?

Mr. Maples: I have much sympathy with the right hon. Gentleman's view but there have been many statements and debates on the subject. There has been no shortage of opportunities for right hon. and hon. Members to present their views. I know that he thinks there should be a vote on a substantive motion but he is in a better position than me to take that up with his Whips.

NATO seems to be encouraging the Kosovo Liberation Army. We have heard remarks about a phoenix rising from the ashes but we must ask who is arming it. It is getting arms, some of which turned out to be NATO arms obtained from Croatia. There is a United Nations arms embargo. If we are to arm the KLA and use it as part of the forces involved, we must answer some difficult questions. How do we get rid of the arms embargo? How will Russia react? I shall come presently to my concerns about the Russian position and the way in which they might be involved.

What is our policy on that matter? What is NATO's policy? The Rambouillet agreement called for the disarming of the KLA. We must accept that, whether we like it or not, the KLA will be a force in the area. The army exists; presumably it is getting recruits; we know that it is getting arms and has a greater incentive to fight for that territory than almost anyone else. How we use or manage the KLA is an important issue and I shall be interested in the Secretary of State's views on that matter.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend makes a point of real significance. If we fail to support the KLA's aim to liberate Kosovo and to enable the Kosovar people—when they all return home—to exercise their fundamental right to self-determination, is it not true that the KLA will obtain its arms from Libya, Iran or other places? It would be much better for us to work with the KLA than for that army to work with malign forces.

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend illustrates the difficulties of operating in that region. However, as I said, a UN arms embargo is in place and I do not think that we in NATO could be seen to be arming the KLA outside it. One of the dangers of the activities of members of the KLA is that they may feed the demand for a Greater Albania, which is part of the potential undermining of the stability of Macedonia and one of the reasons we originally became involved in this matter. There are great threats to the stability of Macedonia that we must consider.

Several of my hon. Friends raised the issue of NATO's credibility in seeing through this matter—my hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip–Northwood, for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), for instance. The Government have put NATO's credibility at stake and that credibility must be redeemed, because our security relies on NATO.

Our relations with Russia have clearly been badly damaged and I am glad that they are being repaired. I am glad that the Foreign Secretary said that he was in touch with Mr. Ivanov, and also that Madeleine Albright has recently met the Russian Foreign Minister. It would be a good idea to consider including the Russians in the peacekeeping force. There is no reason why it has to be a NATO force; in fact, that is one of the things that is unacceptable to the Serbs. If it were an international force under the auspices of the OSCE or the UN, perhaps the Russians could be included. In the long run, the Russians must be part of the solution to this problem.

I have asked the Secretary of State to consider a moratorium on running down the Territorial Army. He has issued a call-out order under the Reserve Forces Act 1996, but we do not know how long that requirement will last. The whole strategic defence review will have to be reconsidered in the light of the long-term commitments that we make in this area. We cannot sustain such commitments for long under the current SDR. Will he consider reviewing the run-down of the Territorial Army, at least temporarily until we know where we are?

I have previously expressed my concern that there does not seem to be a long-term strategy or plan for the Balkan region as a whole. We seem to have dealt with it piecemeal and at present we are dealing with a particular, and fairly small, part of the problem in political terms—although it is huge in terms of human suffering. We need a Kosovo settlement that will allow the Albanian Kosovars to return with an international protection force. I agree with that. However, if we do not depose or get rid of Milosevic, we shall need an agreement with Serbia if long-term stability is to be achieved. That will involve dealing with the Serb Government, so we should not put ourselves in a position in which that becomes impossible. We need a policy for the sustainability and stability of the whole region and I am not sure that such a policy is in place. However, when it is, it will be clear that Serbia must be part of the settlement.

The atrocities about which we read daily in our newspapers and which we see on our television screens continually bring home to us all the scale of human tragedy unfolding in Kosovo and the sheer evil embodied in the Milosevic regime. The Government are right to want Kosovo's refugees to return to their homes in peace and security. We support the Government in those objectives and we support our armed forces in achieving them and wish them success. However, this is war—with all the uncertainties, dangers and bloodshed that are its constant companions. It is not surprising that events are not unfolding as planned; it would be surprising if they were. Not only is this a war, but it is a war in the Balkans, where instability and conflict have been a recurrent reality throughout history, and where great powers have feared to tread, or have come to grief before.

The Government have put NATO's credibility at stake in this matter, and that credibility must be redeemed. Many hon. Members have put the point forcefully today that our security depends on NATO and we cannot afford to see it fail. We hope that the outcome of these events will be not only a peaceful return to Kosovo by its population, but part of an overall settlement of the

post-Tito, post-communist Balkans. In pursuing the highly principled objectives which they have set themselves, the Government must ensure that we do not become permanently militarily engaged in that complex and dangerous part of Europe.

For all those reasons, we have felt it right to ask the questions that we have put to Ministers today and on previous occasions. We do not expect public answers to all those questions, but we hope that the House can be confident that the Government have addressed them and thought them through fully.

9.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Robertson): This is the second full debate on this subject in the House since the commencement of NATO air operations against President Milosevic's repression of the Kosovar Albanians. It is right that the House should have the opportunity to debate those momentous events. Today's debate, like the others, has allowed all shades of opinion in the House to be ventilated, which is in stark contrast to the situation inside Serbia, where dissenting voices are crushed by fear of an autocrat who will stop at absolutely nothing to preserve his power.

I should like to highlight several of the speeches that have been made today. As is inevitable—indeed, it is the very purpose of debate—hon. Members have asked questions, and I hope to be able to answer some of them and respond to some of the concerns that have been expressed. However, I watched the nine o'clock news, in which the BBC's political editor characterised the debate as one that showed "growing concern" about the Government and NATO's position, so let me highlight those speakers who have given general support to the Government's position.

The right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith); my hon. Friends the Members for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Walsall, South (Mr. George); the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Fife (Mr. Campbell); the hon. Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Soames); my hon. Friends the Members for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) and for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw); my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Ms Kingham), who made a very eloquent speech; my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks); the hon. Member for Stratford–on–Avon (Mr. Maples); and the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) all gave support for the position adopted by the Government, while asking the inevitable questions on behalf of the community as a whole. I shall have insulted hon. Members on both sides of the House whom I have omitted, but that list of speakers emphasises the way in which the House has given general support to the Government during this debate. It is worth making that point, not only to those who would take a handful of soundbites from the debate, but to those on the other side of our continent, who will characterise dissenting voices as speaking for the majority.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for a moment.

Having identified those right hon. and hon. Members who have offered general support—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was about to join them—I turn to the other speakers. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made his usual eloquent but predictable speech, saying that we should not get involved in any action. He called in aid the United Nations, but let me remind him of what Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, said last week. It is significant that Mr. Annan not only endorsed NATO's objectives in Kosovo but said:

"Emerging slowly, but I believe surely, is an international norm against the violent repression of minorities that will and must take precedence over concerns of State sovereignty."

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) again made his dissident speech, which he is entitled to do, although I consider him to be wrong. However, let me remind him of what he said on 12 July 1995, when he was addressing Malcolm Rifkind, the then Foreign Secretary. Then the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead, he said:

"What does the Secretary of State, who in his previous job had quite a line in bellicosity, say to the charge on the lips of millions of Muslims around the world this morning, that, if oil was flowing in the streets of Srebrenica rather than just blood, 29 countries would quickly have assembled a vast armada of armies and air forces to come to the rescue of a sovereign state and a member of the United Nations that is being invaded and subjected to brutal aggression?"—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 960.]

Mr. Galloway: The Secretary of State's latter point is crucial. Bosnia-Herzegovina was a sovereign state that was attacked from the outside, whereas Kosovo is part of Serbia. That was our position until a few months ago. We have joined a civil war within Serbia on the side of an organisation which last year was on the US State Department's list of international terrorist organisations.

Mr. Robertson: So it is all right to attack, rape and murder Muslims so long as they are not in an independent state which is not Kuwait. That seems a very strange attitude to adopt.

On the eve of NATO's 50th anniversary, [illegible]. Members should reflect on the origins of the alliance and its purpose. It was born out of a desire to secure a just settlement in Europe in the aftermath of the second world war. It preserved freedom in western Europe throughout the cold war and eventually triumphed over the dictatorship of the Soviet Union.

Today, in Milosevic, NATO faces a man who seems not to have learned the lessons of history and a man who believes that literally anything justifies his desire to cling to power. Europe at the end of the 20th century cannot accept that political problems are solved by recourse to the tactics of Hitler and Stalin. If we were to do so, we would put at risk the very ideals that NATO stands for: democracy and the rule of law.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary—whose role in the current events has been exemplary and whose conduct has been praised widely—described NATO's response to the humanitarian crisis unleashed by Milosevic and our determination to force Milosevic to comply with the demands of the international community. I add my thanks and congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development, who has done much on the humanitarian front to move forward the great convoy that has saved so many lives in the Balkans.

[Mr. Robertson]

I shall address some of the concerns and issues that right hon. and hon. Members have raised during the debate. Several hon. Members sought clarification—yet again—of the objectives of the military action. I thought that they were clear—they should certainly be clear in Belgrade because we have told them often enough; indeed, the Secretary-General repeated the military objectives last week when he was in Brussels with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Nevertheless, I shall repeat them again tonight.

The political objectives of the campaign are: a verifiable end to all Serb military action and the immediate ending of violence and repression; the withdrawal of Milosevic's military, police and paramilitary forces; agreement to the stationing in Kosovo of an international military peacekeeping force; the unconditional and safe return of all refugees and displaced persons and unhindered access to them by humanitarian aid organisations; and a credible assurance of a willingness to work on the basis of the Rambouillet accords in the establishment of a political framework for Kosovo in conformity with international law and the charter of the United Nations.

From the beginning, our military objectives have been the disruption of Milosevic's repressive operations and the weakening of his forces. They support the political objectives that we have set out, and NATO will continue its military actions until its objectives have been achieved.

Mr. Paice *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I have a very limited amount of time in which to speak and I want to respond to some of the points that have been raised.

Many hon. Members referred to ground forces and the question of an opposed invasion of Kosovo. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon mentioned that, but, unlike other Conservative Members, he also recognised the comments of the Leader of the Opposition when the Prime Minister made his statement about this matter. It is worth remembering the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition on 23 March:

"Although we support the use of ground troops to implement a diplomatic settlement, we shall not support their use to fight for a settlement."

He asked the Prime Minister to

"confirm that those strikes are not a prelude to a ground war and that ground troops would be used only to implement a diplomatic settlement".—[*Official Report*, 23 March 1999; Vol. 328, c. 163.]

It is worth Conservative Members' remembering what their leader said.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Mr. Casale), the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife all raised that issue and suggested that we should have deployed troops to engage in operations on the ground. They suggested that if we had done so, we could have averted the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. They are wrong to imagine that a ground campaign would have prevented the suffering of innocent civilians, but NATO's air campaign has succeeded in disrupting Serbian military operations in Kosovo.

Day by day and night by night, we are cutting into Milosevic's military capabilities. The air strikes will continue until NATO's objectives are met, and there is every chance that the Serbian leadership will soon see sense and decide that the game is no longer worth the candle. If it does not, and if the Serb forces maliciously continue to expel the Kosovar population and seek to hold the territory regardless of the strategic position, NATO will increasingly direct its fire against them.

So far as a ground force is concerned, NATO is of course committed to providing a force to go into Kosovo once the Serbs back down, and part of that force is already in Macedonia, ready to move at short notice. NATO will be updating its planning for that force to take account of the new situation in Kosovo, including the ravages inflicted by Milosevic, the effects of NATO air strikes and NATO's new demand since Rambouillet that all Serb forces should withdraw immediately.

The United Kingdom has already decided to send more of that force to Macedonia so as to be ready to deploy as soon as Milosevic backs down. We are determined that an international military force will be deployed in Kosovo once air strikes have done their job, so that the Kosovar people can return to their homes. At the end of the day, Milosevic will not have a veto.

A number of hon. Members referred to the humanitarian crisis that is now afflicting the countries in and around the Balkans as a result of the expulsion of the Albanians. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) made a powerful speech this evening, following his visit to Macedonia. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley spoke with her usual power about the plight of those who have been left the casualties of these dreadful events.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East, the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, asked about humanitarian air drops to the thousands of displaced people left inside Kosovo. I say to him and others who have asked that question—it is a good question which demands an answer and we have spent a long time considering it—that air dropping of food and other supplies to internally displaced people in Kosovo is not an easy option.

The many insurmountable problems include accurately locating where those people might be hiding and seeking refuge, and accurately and safely dropping supplies to them. There would be hazards to NATO planes if they were to undertake such a mission, and there would be a potential for the supplies to fall into the hands of the Serbs, who might use them as a lure to the refugees. We would also face the sheer difficulty of moving the amount of aid required. We continue to examine the options on that.

I put this powerful point to the House: the responsibility for the human tragedy inside Kosovo, including the miseries being inflicted on those who have been displaced, lies purely with the Serbian leadership, and Slobodan Milosevic in particular. He will be held to account for what happens to those human beings. Frankly, those who are in danger will cease to be in danger only if the campaign of air strikes organised by the 19 Governments, the 19 nations, the 19 Parliaments of NATO is a success.

Hon. Members have raised the issue of the costs of the campaign, which I cannot pretend will not be significant. The estimated costs will be substantial, but I ask the

House to consider the cost of not acting. What would be the cost to all of us on our continent and, indeed, beyond, if we were to stand by, wring our hands, and allow such ethnic cleansing to go ahead and succeed? I estimate that, up until 8 April, the costs that have been incurred total some £17 million, excluding the costs of replenishing stocks of ordnance expended.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) mentioned the cost of humanitarian assistance partly being met by the Department for International Development. I say to him, as I say to those who ask about the defence budget, that, of course, access to the contingency reserve will be sought by the Ministers concerned in the normal way.

A very important issue has been raised both in the House and elsewhere: how NATO selects and clears the targets assigned to aircraft. At the outset of the air campaign, NATO Ministers collectively agreed to certain categories of targets—the first of which was, self-evidently, the Yugoslav air defences. We subsequently agreed to widen the range of targets to include strategic assets such as bridges, barracks and headquarters.

Within those broad categories, an assessment is made of priorities. One of the main factors in reaching decisions is the possibility of causing civilian casualties or damage to civilian buildings—known as collateral damage. More than in any other previous campaign we have used precision-guided munitions to ensure that such damage is avoided.

I personally approve some of the targets, but for most, I have now delegated the decisions to the operational commanders. That allows them to make decisions quickly and to respond to changing requirements. However, I retain the ultimate authority and responsibility for those decisions.

Following a number of tests, the Royal Air Force was able to demonstrate that it had the ability, with the use of dumb bombs, to bomb accurately through clouds with Harrier GR7s. It has subsequently undertaken a number of successful operations against particular targets. Such targets are obviously considered very carefully to minimise—

Mr. Dalyell *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 11, Noes 0.

Division No. 145] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Dalyell, Tam
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bill Michie and
Mr. John McDonnell.

NOES

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mike Hall
Mr. David Jamieson.

It appearing on Report of the Division that fewer than 40 Members had taken part in the Division, MADAM SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided in the affirmative.*

Medicines (Children)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

10.8 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Those hon. Members who are leaving will please do so or resume their seats. *[Interruption.]* How churlish! An hon. Gentleman has the Floor.

Mr. Love: I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of licensing medicines for children, as I believe that it is a very important, if somewhat neglected, issue. I hope in a small way to put that right tonight. I know that the matter is of interest to hon. Members on both sides of the House, as more than 100 colleagues from all parties have shown their support for early-day motion 365, which I tabled a few weeks ago. That motion calls for the Government to

"take steps to strengthen the regulatory system in the UK, and establish a satisfactory system for testing and licensing treatments for use on children."

I repeat that call tonight.

I first looked into this issue as a result of a tragic case in my constituency. Through it, I made contact with the parents of other children who had died following medical treatment and also with Professor Choonara, of Derbyshire children's hospital, who has carried out much of the research into this matter. From his research, I learned, to my amazement, that 25 per cent. of all drugs given to children in hospitals are not licensed for that purpose and that 36 per cent. of all children in hospitals receive drugs in that way.

In addition, a more recent study showed that the figure for newborn babes admitted as patients is even higher: 65 per cent. of all treatments are either unlicensed for that purpose or prescribed off-label, and 90 per cent. of them receive such treatments. I remind the House that those drugs are either totally unlicensed for human administration or licensed solely for use on adults, yet they are still regularly given to children.

My amazement and concern were clearly shared by the Select Committee on Health, whose report "The Specific Health Needs of Children and Young People" was published in February 1997. The Committee's report states:

"the current system in regard to the testing and licensing of medicines for use by children is unacceptable."

The Department of Health is quoted in the report, responding to those concerns by acknowledging that that "unsatisfactory" situation exists. The report goes on to say:

"The Department and the Medicines Control Agency consider that children should have timely access to safe and effective medicines which have accurate, scientifically justified prescribing information".

I should make it clear that unlicensed and off-label prescribing can bring benefits to some patients, and I am not seeking to deprive children of beneficial treatments, but I believe that those treatments should be administered after a rigorous testing and licensing process. Off-label prescribing may also lead to under-dosing of worthwhile treatments, thus depriving children of the full benefits of a drug.

In my attempt to raise this issue, I have received support from general practitioners and paediatricians, and I express my gratitude to them for that. The present system—or, rather, the lack of one—simply leaves doctors to sink or swim with their own clinical knowledge and judgment. Although that may be sufficient for many doctors to prescribe the correct drug and the appropriate dosage, for others it may not be. I have in mind particularly the GP who is not a specialist in child health, but is expected to take responsibility for prescribing a drug of which he has little knowledge. The point is that, without a proper licensing system, we have no way of independently and scientifically assessing those treatments.

I emphasise that I am simply calling for children to be treated in the same way as adults—as individuals entitled to the best medical treatment available. A doctor's clinical judgment must be based on the information available. A substantial part of that information is provided by drugs manufacturers, after full and rigorous clinical trials on a given treatment. If that is what we expect and receive as adults, why should we not expect and provide the same for children?

This is an issue of consumers' rights and, as such, it is of great concern to the Consumers Association, which has campaigned hard for some time. I believe that paediatricians and GPs should be required to inform patients and, in cases involving children, parents when an unlicensed or off-label drug is given. I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Minister's views.

A further consequence of unlicensed and off-label prescribing is the apparent inability to monitor adverse reactions to particular dosages of a drug. The Medicines Control Agency is able to track any adverse reactions as a licensed drug is used and, if necessary, amend the instructions on how it should be administered. When a product is used outside the licence, such monitoring and feedback simply cannot happen, as there is no on-going mechanism within which it can take place.

I would argue, therefore, that children are disfranchised in that process. They have to rely much more heavily than adults on unlicensed and off-label treatments and the treatments that they are given are not subject to the monitoring and on-going review of licensed medicines. Nevertheless, adverse reactions to off-label and unlicensed treatments exist, and I expect that in some cases they are reported to the Medicines Control Agency and the Committee on Safety of Medicines. When I asked the Minister about that, his response was:

"there is no centrally held record of suspected adverse reactions to medicines."

Perhaps he could tell the House tonight what happens to any information that is received. Is it filed, or simply disposed of because no mechanism exists to process it?

The Government are funding a pilot research project into adverse medical reactions in children in the Trent region. The project has been running for six months and funding of £38,000 has already been committed. However, I understand that Trent region is happy to back the research for a further three years, conditional on the Medicines Control Agency funding its share. So far, the agency appears to be unwilling to commit itself. Already,

however, the project has shown signs of success, with a 100 per cent. increase in the reporting of adverse reactions in the first six months.

It is also significant that, in June, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health will produce the first national formulary to include data on drugs prescribed for children. It will be funded by the Nuffield Foundation as a one-off edition and will be sold commercially to raise funds for future editions. However, it is hoped that the Department of Health will fund future editions, to be published and updated regularly. To date, the Department has not said that it wants to take on that role. Will the Minister comment?

The use of unlicensed and off-label treatments is not a new problem; it has been recognised and addressed by the United States and the European Union. From April this year, pharmaceutical companies in the United States will be compelled to provide information about the effects of their drugs on children if such a use is likely. Significantly, for such information to be required, the use on children needs only to be "likely". In written questions, I asked the Secretary of State whether the Government would look at the US system. I hope that the Minister will elaborate tonight on that basis.

In 1995, the EU established guidance on the clinical investigation of medicinal products in children, which came into effect in September 1997. I understand that the Government played a major role in developing that guidance, so I presume that the Minister is familiar and broadly sympathetic with its content. As it is guidance and not a directive, it does not compel member states or drugs companies to do anything. Nevertheless, I draw the House's attention to its opening lines:

"Children should not be given medicines which have not been adequately evaluated for use in that age group. There is a responsibility, shared by applicants and the competent authorities, to ensure that children have timely access to safe and effective medicines which have accurate, scientifically justified, prescribing information."

What steps are the Government taking to monitor the application of the guidance to establish which products are licensed in accordance with the guidance and from which drugs companies?

I understand that research will soon be published in *The British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology*, which looks at practice in licensing at the time the EU guidance was formulated. That research highlights the need for pharmaceutical companies and enforcement agencies to undergo a change in attitude to effect the necessary change in the licensing process.

As compliance with the EU guidance is entirely voluntary, drugs companies have little incentive to apply to license their products in that way. However, a joint British Paediatric Association and Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry working party was set up and recommendations were made to address the unsatisfactory situation. My concern is that, although those recommendations are worthy in themselves, they are worth little without action to implement them. Experience of the commercial sector suggests that drugs companies ultimately follow the profit motive. Indeed, I understand that they are requesting extended intellectual property rights to encourage the industry to follow the guidance.

Significantly, the US Government have tried such a carrot-and-stick approach—compelling drugs companies to provide information about the effects of their drugs on children, but also offering them the financial incentive of a six-month extension to their patents in exchange for comprehensive paediatric data. Have the Government evaluated the benefits of such a system in the UK?

There is a need for the Government to step in to regulate a situation where the other parties are unwilling or unable to act. The use of unlicensed and off-label treatments in children merits such intervention. I would add also that both the pharmaceutical industry and the medical profession could have addressed the issue some years ago, so any accumulated costs are due to years of inaction.

The reasons for a specific licensing system for children are clear. Physiologically, children and babies differ considerably from adults. I refer again to the EU guidance, which states:

"The effects of many medicinal products on children may differ considerably from those observed in adults, even when dosage has been adapted to body weight or body surface area."

Drugs affect children differently in terms of side effects and the way in which a child's body absorbs and processes a drug. That must be recognised in the licensing system. Evaluating the suitability of any given drug for children is, therefore, a far more sophisticated process than, for example, simply taking the adult dosage of a given drug and halving it.

The only sensible way forward is to follow the recommendations in the European guidance and to establish clinical trials for drugs that are likely to be used on children. Of course, the participation of any child in such trials would have to be with the full consent of the parents concerned and, where appropriate, with the informed consent of the child. Such a process would have to be carefully monitored at every stage, and any adverse reactions speedily evaluated and treated.

I recognise that the notion of testing on children can, in itself, be seen as alarming because the last thing that anyone would want is to put a child through any kind of hazardous process. However, I believe that this is infinitely better than what we have at present—a hit-and-miss system in which all children are potential guinea pigs without their knowledge or the knowledge of their parents. There is a responsibility on the Government to recognise the need for the education of parents and the wider public about the very good reasons for a proper testing process.

There is an irony here, in that the Medicines Act 1967—which introduced the licensing system—came as a result of the thalidomide disaster, a drug which directly affected children, yet the present system effectively excludes children from the licensing process. That cannot continue to be justified.

Finally, I draw the House's attention to the main reason for this debate—the human cost of not taking any action. Lexie McConnell was nine years old when she died in November 1992. Her immune system collapsed following a steroid overdose after she had been given doses licensed only for use on adults. Lexie was being treated by a specialist at the John Radcliffe teaching hospital in Oxford for a relatively minor eye injury, yet her treatment still went tragically wrong.

If a proper licensing system had been established, Lexie might have received the correct dosage, or she might have been prescribed a different drug altogether. Unfortunately, Lexie's case is not an isolated one. Action must be taken

[Mr. Love]

to prevent this kind of failure from occurring in the future. I pay tribute to Lexie's parents, Art and Victoria McConnell—who are present in the House tonight—and to all the other bereaved parents for the dignified way in which they have campaigned on the issue. On their behalf, I strongly urge the Minister to strengthen the regulatory system for children.

10.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on his success in raising this matter for the House to consider tonight. The subject has been generating increasing interest and concern from both health professionals and the public. I welcome the opportunity afforded by this debate to consider the issue of medicines for children. I thank my hon. Friend for his thoughtful, considered and well-informed remarks.

I shall try to respond to all the points that my hon. Friend has raised, but first let me say that as a father myself, I sympathise deeply with the parents of all the children to whom he referred. No one expects to outlive his or her children, and there can be few more tragic events than the death, for whatever reason, of a dearly loved son or daughter. The pain and anguish in such circumstances I know, from my personal experience, to be immense, and I think that the thoughts of the House will always go out to those in that terrible position.

The treatment of children generally is an emotive issue, as well as an important area of service provision. The Government would be extremely concerned if any section of the public were exposed to treatment that was less well regulated or of poorer quality than that available to others, or denied treatment that should be available.

The role of the Government in ensuring that safe and effective medicines are available for the treatment of those of all ages is primarily regulatory, but the Government also have a role in providing industry and health professionals with advice and guidance. I shall say something shortly about the areas in which the Government can and do encourage those with the initiative to address this important issue, but the initiative for undertaking appropriate development work and conducting appropriate clinical trials rests with the pharmaceutical industry, which, once it is satisfied that a product should be marketed, submits its application to the regulatory authority for the appropriate licence.

It is worth pausing for a moment to note the historical perspective. Until quite recently—in the last 10 or so years—it was considered unethical to conduct the very clinical trials that would have helped to demonstrate the safety and efficacy of medicines for children, and ethical considerations remain an important factor.

For manufacturers seeking to license their products for use in the United Kingdom, the licensing authority currently consists of the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Responsibility for undertaking the appropriate assessment of new products and the monitoring of products already on the market resides with the Medicines Control Agency, which acts on their behalf. The agency is responsible for ensuring that medicines on the market in the United Kingdom are safe, of suitable quality and effective for the purpose for which they have been licensed.

The Government recently established the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which is designed to ensure that every national health service patient in the country is given the most effective treatment available. It will identify best practice and help to spread it quickly, and it will advise doctors and nurses on which treatments work best for patients and the NHS and which do not.

My hon. Friend has expressed concern about the extent to which children may be being treated with medicines not specifically licensed for such use. It would, of course, be a matter of great concern if that led to children being given medicines in circumstances in which their use proves to be hazardous. The safety of all medicinal products licensed for use in the United Kingdom is continuously monitored by the Medicines Control Agency, via a voluntary reporting scheme involving doctors and pharmacists.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In the last Parliament, I was informed by my hon. Friend's predecessor that the number of people dying from the effects of one widely available drug, paracetamol, had fallen from 57 to 48. Other sources—coroners' courts—showed that the actual number of deaths during the period concerned had been not 48 but 586. Is it not true that now, as then, there is huge under-reporting of deaths that have occurred as a result of the use of medicinal drugs, and that the present system does not depend on the reporting of side-effects and tragedies by doctors? It does not work: it vastly under-reports the number of tragedies.

Mr. Hutton: I am not aware of the parliamentary exchanges that my hon. Friend had with my predecessor in another Administration. I also remind him that we are discussing medicines for children. I am not sure how many of the deaths that he mentioned were children's deaths.

Mr. Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Hutton: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I make some progress, and deal with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton. However, I acknowledge the points that he made, and the seriousness with which he made them.

The yellow card adverse drug reaction scheme, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton referred, asks clinicians—both GPs and hospital doctors—as well as pharmacists and others to report any suspected adverse reactions to the MCA. Companies are obliged to submit individual reports of adverse reactions and periodic safety update reports containing information relating to suspected adverse drug reactions, drug usage and safety studies, as available, for MCA assessment at regular intervals throughout a product's lifespan.

The data are used to inform both the agency and the manufacturer of the safety profile of the product once it is in use in a wider section of the population than is possible under clinical trial conditions before licensing. Those reports are reviewed by experienced professional staff at the MCA before renewing product licences, a process that occurs every five years in the life of a pharmaceutical product.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton specifically referred to adverse reaction reports for unlicensed medicines and off-label use. I should like to reassure him

that the well-established systems for monitoring the safety of marketed medicines cover all patient groups, including children and off-label usage. Clinicians have been reminded of that fact in a bulletin from the MCA, which went to doctors, dentists, pharmacists and coroners; it was issued in September 1997. Nevertheless, a more targeted approach to surveillance of medicines that are used by children is without question fully warranted.

To that end, in addition to the regular reporting arrangements, we have supported an initiative in Trent region—my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton referred to it—specifically to encourage reporting of adverse drug reactions in the use of medicines in the treatment of children. That scheme has been operating for a little under a year. However, it is reassuring to be able to report that, within the time frame of the project, no major safety issues have been reported.

I am happy to be able to reassure my hon. Friend, and I hope he will recognise, that, in the very act of committing funding to the project, the Government have signalled their determination and willingness to find ways in which to improve the current system. If the scheme proves to fulfil that need in the best way, subject, obviously, to a full and proper evaluation, we shall continue to fund it.

My hon. Friend referred to the work of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health on a national formulary to include data on drugs prescribed for children. He asked a specific question about funding for future editions of the formulary. As far as I am aware, the Department has received no application to fund a future edition, but, if any such request were made, the Department would be very willing to consider the proposal.

My hon. Friend might be aware—I am sure that he is—that the formulary will cover some 300 medicines commonly used in the treatment of the paediatric population. It will include medicines specifically licensed for such use and medicinal products that are not currently licensed for use in the treatment of children, where advice on the appropriate indications and dosage use for different age groups based on other research findings and evidence has been compiled by the joint committee. It is hoped that the formulary will be issued to the health service by the committee in May or June. I am sure that that will be an important and welcome development.

I turn to the specific question of availability of licensed medicines for use in the treatment of children. It is true to say that a sizeable proportion of medicines is available and formally licensed for use in the treatment of many illnesses that can occur in the paediatric population. Indeed, some products have been developed specifically for such use.

There are other products for which specific clinical trials of a product have not been conducted in the paediatric population, but where the manufacturer and the licensing authority have no reason to suppose that its safety and efficacy will be such that it should not be used in the treatment of children. Such products cannot and should not be defined as "unlicensed" for use in the treatment of children.

A further category of products is those where the terms of the licence and the patient leaflet may state that use in children is not for use in the paediatric population. Those medicines can indeed be described as "unlicensed" for such use. Nevertheless, there are circumstances when the use of such medicines may, in the view of a clinician, be justified and, indeed, necessary. In any circumstance where a doctor prescribes for a patient, he or she must assume the responsibility for that action.

In the case of treatment of children with unusual conditions, GPs will usually seek the advice of specialists before prescribing treatment with products that are unlicensed or will have to be used "off-label". Such specialists build up a body of knowledge and expertise in the treatment of children's illnesses and have developed treatment regimes to respond to them. There is also a significant volume of published and experimental data available and schemes are in place which make that information available to prescribers of medicines in the paediatric population.

The wide availability of so-called "specials" manufactured commercially and by the NHS has developed in part as a response to the needs of those specialists. Although such products may not have been subjected to assessment of safety, quality and efficacy by the MCA, manufacturers are required to hold a "specials" licence, to have suitably qualified persons responsible for production and quality control and are subjected to inspection by the agency. Their use is carefully monitored by prescribers, and much of the body of information and advice available to those prescribing for children has been compiled from experience gained in practical usage of those, and formally licensed, medicinal products.

I turn now to the question of what additional action could be taken to improve the availability of medicines licensed specifically for the treatment of the paediatric population. I know that that is a matter of especial concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton and the parents of the child to whom he referred. The Government share the view of those who have expressed their concerns that a wider range of properly assessed and licensed products for use in the treatment of children of all ages should be available.

My hon. Friend raised a point about the very real value of the use of some of those medicines and I agree with him that, important as this debate is, it must not deprive children of the benefits that use of such medicines can bring. We expect that the pharmaceutical industry shares this view. We would like to see them working constructively with the MCA to provide appropriate data to support inclusion of relevant information in the licence. That will ensure that clinicians have access to clear information about the use of their products in the treatment of the paediatric population. Such information also needs to be available in the patient leaflet for the parent or carer.

So far, I have spoken only of the UK's regulatory position. However, much of the legislation that underpins medicines control in the UK now derives from European directives. While that has contributed significantly to improved standards of regulation throughout Europe, it does also mean that any change to the legislation—for example, any proposal that increased the data required from the pharmaceutical industry on use of their products in the paediatric population—would need to be widely discussed and agreed Europe-wide.

Such discussions have already been initiated and there is already a European guideline which the UK played a leading role in developing, which makes it clear that if a product is likely to be used on children, the regulatory

[Mr. Hutton]

authorities such as the MCA will expect data to be presented from clinical trials in the appropriate age group. The principles set out in the guideline are also being taken forward at an international level through the International Conference for the Harmonisation—the ICH—of technical standards for the registration of medicinal products. The aim is to have an agreed guideline to be adopted throughout the EU, Japan and the USA. However, that is only a guideline and does not have the force of law, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton acknowledged. In the USA, a similar initiative has met with only limited success in encouraging the pharmaceutical industry there to conduct appropriate clinical trials. I can reassure my hon. Friend that we will be looking at the US experience very carefully.

We expect that the pharmaceutical industry will take heed of the European guideline and be prepared to work with us—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 20 April 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

IMPERIAL COLLEGE BILL

Order for Third Reading read.

Queen's consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Kosovo

1. **Ms Oona King** (Bethnal Green and Bow): When he next plans to meet his European counterparts to discuss developments in Kosovo. [79944]

19. **Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde): When he last met his colleagues from other member states of the European Union to discuss matters relating to the current political and military circumstances in Kosovo. [79965]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I speak nearly every day to Madeleine Albright and to Foreign Ministers of other major allies. Recent meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the European Union and of NATO have endorsed unanimously the objectives of our military campaign in Yugoslavia. Those objectives are a ceasefire in Kosovo with the withdrawal of all Serb forces from Kosovo, and the return of the refugees under international military protection.

The meeting last week of European Heads of Government confirmed that there can be no compromise on those objectives. Anything less would reward President Milosevic for his brutal and deliberate programme of ethnic cleansing and would be a betrayal of the right of the Kosovo refugees to return to their homes in safety.

Ms King: A constituent of mine, Fadil Dugolli, visited me on Friday. He is a Kosovan refugee. His mother has died since the conflict began, and his two sisters are currently unaccounted for in Albania. He said to me, "Tell them not to stop the bombing. Milosevic has been killing us—murdering us—slowly, for years." Does my right hon. Friend agree with those words? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we want a United Nations protectorate and self-determination for the Kosovans, we must be determined to use ground troops?

Mr. Cook: I said to the House yesterday that the international community would have to accept more direct responsibility for the interim administration of Kosovo than was previously envisaged. We want, if possible, to get agreement from the other permanent members to secure a UN resolution giving us a mandate for that administration. My hon. Friend is right to say that that would need to be backed up by ground troops to guarantee security and to underwrite a ceasefire.

However, I also echo the point with which my hon. Friend began. One of the issues that gives us the resolve and determination to see through this conflict is the solid support that we have received from the Kosovar Albanians. None of them has said that they fled the NATO bombing: all of them are clear that the military action must continue until they are able to go home.

Dr. Godman: May I remind my right hon. Friend that last week, in evidence to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, he said that the international community had the right to intervene to protect the human rights of individuals, communities and peoples against tyrants? However, does he agree that such intervention is out of kilter with extant international law and the modus operandi of the Security Council? In the long run, after peace has been secured in Kosovo, we must ensure that international law—which is itself out of kilter with the modern world—is brought into line so that it can cover the intra-state wars which are increasingly common.

Mr. Cook: First, we are confident that the action that we are taking is fully based on international law. However, I agree with my hon. Friend, and I echo the statement of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who has said that the rights enshrined by the UN should be enjoyed by peoples, and should not be confined to Governments. No Government have the right to defend, on grounds of sovereignty, oppression of their people and ethnic cleansing such as has occurred in Kosovo. For that reason, we are right to act, and it will be right to ensure that this becomes the basis for an approach to future conflict.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Today, in Brussels, the Prime Minister said that the Government intend to see the matter through to the end. Does the use of such an expression not imply that, if the option of using ground troops arises, NATO will be willing to impose its will on Kosovo and will not rely on receiving the agreement of Mr. Milosevic before determining to put troops into Kosovo?

Mr. Cook: There can be no question of President Milosevic having a veto. I very much hope that we would be able to obtain UN backing for making sure that we can carry through a solution. However, we must be realistic. We have said from the start that we do not intend to fight our way into Kosovo. We cannot: to do so would require a much larger invasion than we have in that theatre at present. It would require agreement from countries in the neighbourhood that we do not have, and it would also mean that our troops would be taking part in an armed invasion in territory that was very inhospitable and did not lend itself easily to such an operation.

We are willing to provide the ground troops to secure a ceasefire. We are also willing to put in ground troops at the point at which there may be no organised armed resistance, but an armed invasion would incur far greater casualties on both sides than the present military campaign.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): Following on from what the Foreign Secretary said, is there not a danger that we are fighting a war in which we believe that no one can get hurt except the enemy? The right hon. Gentleman talked about a protectorate. Am I to understand that there would be troops on the ground under NATO command to give the necessary protection? Does that mean that he has ruled out the partition of Kosovo and independence for the Kosovars, even if there were safeguards for the very holy Serb places in Kosovo?

Mr. Cook: No one in the Government imagines that we can fight a campaign of this intensity without anyone getting hurt. The Prime Minister said at the outset that we cannot give a guarantee of no casualties on our side. Everyone will share our relief that there have been no allied casualties, but we cannot guarantee that that will necessarily continue.

On ground troops, we are committed, and have been ever since the Rambouillet talks, to committing forces as part of international military protection to Kosovo. Forces from NATO would be under NATO command, but I would hope that other countries would join us. I assure the House that we have no intention of consenting to the partition of Kosovo. To do so would be to legitimate the policy of ethnic cleansing and a new apartheid in Europe.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Given that we have almost total air superiority and that the bombing has succeeded, or is succeeding, in cutting oil and other supply routes into Kosovo, will there not come a time when it is possible feasibly to introduce ground troops?

Mr. Cook: I think that I have already touched on that point in answer to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). It is possible to conceive of a situation in which it may be feasible to commit ground troops in circumstances in which they would not meet organised armed resistance and in which the Serb army would already be withdrawing from Kosovo. I repeat to the House: that should not be confused with any commitment, intention or capacity on our part to mount an armed invasion against organised resistance.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary said that, after the fighting, the administration of Kosovo would need to be placed in the hands of international bodies, including the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union. A few moments ago, he appeared to indicate that he had not yet obtained agreement to that among the members of the Security Council of the United Nations. Has he obtained agreement from our NATO allies, the neighbouring countries, the OSCE and the European Union?

Mr. Cook: I have to say to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that, if it is to be a condition of making a policy announcement to the House that we first obtain the agreement of the 19 members of NATO, the 15 members of the Security Council and the 40-odd members of the OSCE, the House will not often hear a statement that will come as news to it. What I indicated is the preference and policy of the Government. We have shared that with close allies, and I am at present confident that it commands a consensus, but not unanimity.

Mr. Howard: It would inspire much greater confidence if, yesterday or today, the Foreign Secretary had been prepared to answer the question. The answer to the question is no. There is no difficulty about giving that answer, but it does not inspire confidence if the right hon. Gentleman does not give a clear answer. Concern was expressed yesterday in many quarters of the House about the lack of clarity in the way in which the Government were expressing their goals and methods of achieving their objectives. It would inspire much greater confidence if he gave straight answers to simple questions such as those that I have asked.

Mr. Cook: With respect to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who I know is trying hard to build bipartisan support for our case, my reply to him could not have been clearer. There is no doubt whatsoever about the clarity of our objectives. They have been restated in identical terms twice in the text of European Union meetings and of the North Atlantic Council meeting. They have been repeated in the House on several occasions. Indeed, I am now so familiar with them that they are etched on my brain like the Lord's prayer. There is no doubt about the clarity of our objectives. It is about time that the Opposition, if they really support our campaign, accepted that they understand and share them.

EU Enlargement

2. **Ms Claire Ward** (Watford): What progress is being made on the negotiations for the enlargement of the European Union. [79945]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Ms Joyce Quin): Good progress is being made on enlargement. By June, it is intended that half the chapters to be examined in the accession negotiations will have been opened with Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Estonia, Slovenia and Cyprus. The Berlin European Council confirmed the priority that the European Union attaches to enlargement, and the Agenda 2000 agreement makes financial provision for enlargement of up to six new member states between 2002 and 2006.

Ms Ward: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does she agree that the discussions in June on the size of the Commission and the voting weight of members must seriously deal with the prospect not of six new members, but of an even larger European Union? Does she agree that a cumbersome and bureaucratic Commission will do nothing to further partnership for all EU members?

Ms Quin: The points that my hon. Friend makes are important and need to be considered by the Council of Ministers. It is clear that the stimulus to enlargement comes not only from the six countries that I mentioned, but from other countries that have a natural desire to be part of the European Union in future. It is therefore

incumbent on the Council to ensure that decisions are made that will facilitate that enlargement in a climate of efficient, transparent and open decision making.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): Despite the rhetoric that the Minister employs and the good speech that she made at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the reality of what happened at Berlin simply does not stack up with what she is saying. Does she not understand that the European accession countries have realised that? Did she notice that the enlargement section of the 35-page document on the conclusions of the Berlin summit amounted to no more than four small sentences tucked away right at the end? With the Agenda 2000 process now clearly seen as a means of fixing differences between existing members of the EU, what encouragement has she to offer to those countries that long to benefit from the stability and support of membership of the EU?

Ms Quin: It is not a question of rhetoric; it is a question of putting in place the necessary measures and mechanisms to ensure that enlargement can take place. That is exactly what we are committed to do. The Agenda 2000 negotiations were all about that. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman look at some of the reactions to Agenda 2000 from various Governments in the applicant countries. They have expressed satisfaction that we kept to the timetable because they feel that that is a guarantee that enlargement can take place.

India and Pakistan

3. **Ms Margaret Moran** (Luton, South): What assessment his Department has made of future relations between India and Pakistan; and if he will make a statement. [79946]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): Good relations between India and Pakistan are important for regional stability. The resumption of talks between the two countries, including the meeting of Prime Ministers in Lahore in February, is a particularly welcome development. We wish India and Pakistan success in their efforts to resolve all bilateral issues, and urge them to refrain from actions that might heighten tensions.

Ms Moran: I welcome the Lahore declaration, especially the element that relates to both Governments' intentions to intensify their resolve to settle the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a significant step on the part of the Indian Government if they signified their intentions in relation to the Lahore agreement and allowed more international human rights groups into Indian-held Kashmir? Will he use his powers of persuasion to encourage them in that direction?

Mr. Lloyd: It is a matter of recorded fact that we deplore the violence inflicted on the civilian population in Kashmir and call on all parties to refrain from acts of violence, which of course infringe the human rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. In that context, we have also supported access to the area for the United Nations special rapporteur. We would welcome access for non-governmental organisations that have expertise in the area, but the significance of the Lahore declaration is that a commitment has been made by both Governments. We hope that, whatever Indian Government emerge from the current uncertainty, they will maintain that commitment to take forward bilateral talks to resolve once and for all the problems in Kashmir.

EU Enlargement

4. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): What discussions he has had on the proposals of the Berlin European Council on EU enlargement. [79947]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Ms Joyce Quin): I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Ms Ward).

Mr. Griffiths: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the deal that the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister secured on Agenda 2000 at the Berlin summit. Does she agree that an important part of successful enlargement will be for the economically weaker parts of the United Kingdom, such as west Wales and the valleys, to raise their business and economic performance by taking full advantage of objective 1 status in preparation for the new markets that enlargement will offer?

Ms Quin: My hon. Friend is right: the overall result that we obtained at Berlin was excellent. In particular, he is right to refer to the deal on structural funds that has especially benefited certain areas of the UK, including his own. The point that he makes about preparing business for the enlargement of the EU is tremendously important. The Government are keen for business throughout the UK to prepare for enlargement, in order to build up good commercial and trading links with the new countries that will join in the future.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Minister realise that many of the countries that she listed as applying for membership of the EU were held under the undemocratic structures of the Warsaw pact and the Soviet bloc only a few years ago? In the light of the statements made recently by Mr. Prodi, the new head-to-be of the Commission, that his aim is to create a single economy and a single state in Europe, will she ensure that those new applicant countries are clearly warned that, having recently regained their democracy, they are in danger of losing it if they apply to a Europe headed by such a man with such aims?

Ms Quin: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the countries applying to join the European Union see that precisely as a way of safeguarding and emphasising democracy and security. Indeed, that is one of the most attractive aspects for those countries of belonging to the EU.

East Timor

5. **Mr. David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): If he will make a statement on his policy towards the future status of East Timor. [79949]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): We continue to support the efforts under United Nations auspices to secure a future for East Timor that will fully respect the interests and legitimate aspirations of the East Timorese people.

Mr. Taylor: Will my hon. Friend tell the Indonesian Government that they must exercise far tighter control over the paramilitaries in East Timor? If Indonesia is ever to be a full and respected member of the global community, it must accord full democratic rights to the people of East Timor; it is certainly not doing that at present.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend raises two important issues. There is a need for a solution in East Timor that respects the rights of its people. It is certainly true that this Government are strongly committed to the UN process. I can tell the House that, over the forthcoming days, there will be meetings between Foreign Minister Alatas of Indonesia and Foreign Minister Gama of Portugal to pursue that agenda.

We also urge strongly that there should be respect for the fundamental human rights that were so appallingly betrayed in recent incidents in Liquica and Dili, where there were about 50 and 30 deaths respectively. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has written to President Habibie drawing his attention to our great concern about that matter and, of course, we shall continue to press the Indonesian Government to ensure that the Indonesian military offer protection not only to pro-integrationists, but to all the people of East Timor.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I welcome the initiative of the Prime Minister in writing to President Habibie. Is it not true that, apart from Portugal, the United Kingdom is especially well placed to intervene to help to secure an appropriate political destiny for the people of East Timor, who have been oppressed for far too long? Is it not also true that President Habibie, who has worked in the aircraft industry and knows the United Kingdom, and his brother, who was a respected ambassador for his country to the Court of St. James, have a family interest in maintaining good relations with the UK? We could say that, if Indonesia does not grant autonomy or self-determination to East Timor, we will not provide the financial assistance that Indonesia so badly needs.

Mr. Lloyd: With the exception of Portugal, which has a unique role in respect of East Timor, Britain has been at the forefront in Europe's debates with the Government of Indonesia and more generally. It is true that we have used our influence to press for precisely the type of progress and process that is now beginning to take place at the United Nations. We welcome the more positive notes that have been struck since President Habibie came to power and shall continue to maintain the pressure that we have already applied so that matters come to fruition through the UN process and the people of East Timor become the masters of their destiny.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Given that the Indonesian army is responsible for training and arming the paramilitaries who are wreaking havoc throughout East Timor and who are likely later to frustrate the UN ballot, will my hon. Friend raise that matter in the meeting of EU Foreign Ministers next week and call on the Indonesian Government to disarm and disband the paramilitaries and get all the Indonesian troops out of East Timor, or the ballot will not take place?

Mr. Lloyd: There is no doubt in our mind that the Indonesian military has a responsibility not only to pro-integrationist forces, but to all people living in East Timor. During the recent appalling events in Liquica and Dili, where deaths occurred, protection for the people from the armed forces was not forthcoming. Both publicly and privately, we remind the Indonesian military of its responsibility to offer security to everyone. That is the gist of the strong message that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister sent to President Habibie yesterday.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): In view of the atrocities that have occurred in East Timor, in view of the fact that the Indonesian Government have been arming the paramilitaries and in view of the apparent acquiescence of the Indonesian Government, will the Minister ensure that the views of the British Government are expressed in terms as strong as those used by both the Portuguese and the Australians? In addition, will he give an assurance that the British Government will not sell more arms to Indonesia?

Mr. Lloyd: On the second point, I invite the hon. Gentleman to read the recently published report on arms sales. He will discover that, despite rather lurid accounts that spoke of this Government having licensed the sale of quite sophisticated and complex weapons systems, the annual report proves that there is no truth in those allegations. The letter that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister sent to President Habibie was couched in the most clear-cut and strong terms, and President Habibie is in no doubt about our strong concern about current events and our view that he, as President, has a responsibility to ensure that the Indonesian military plays its part in restraining all sides from committing acts of violence.

European Commission

6. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): If he will make a statement on the future role of the European Commission. [79950]

11. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on the appointment of the new President of the European Commission. [79955]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Ms Joyce Quin): The Government are in favour of a European Commission that is efficient, transparent and accountable. The independent experts' report revealed a catalogue of deficiencies in the Commission's internal structures and practices, but the resignation of the Commission gives us an opportunity to ensure that, in future, the Commission carries out its functions more effectively and makes much better use of taxpayers' money. The Berlin European Council took a decisive step towards that by agreeing the nomination of the new Commission President.

Mr. Blizzard: Does my right hon. Friend share my view that the only sensible words ever uttered by the

noble Baroness Thatcher were that "advisers advise, Ministers decide"? That is the principle that underlies the civil service in this country; should it not also be true of the European Commission? Will the people of this country not accept more readily the institutions of the EU if they are confident that decisions are taken by democratically elected Ministers, rather than by unelected bureaucrats? Will my right hon. Friend use this opportunity to press for reform of the European Commission that brings about that state of affairs?

Ms Quin: The Government have tabled a number of proposals for reforms. It should be emphasised that, in European decision making, the elected Council of Ministers has the final say and is responsible for making final decisions; that is a system of which we approve. As for the accountability of the European Commission, a great deal can be done to improve matters in terms of its relations with both the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, and we have made proposals in that respect.

Mr. Bercow: In backing for the presidency of the European Commission Mr. Prodi, who says that economic and monetary union and political union are two sides of the same coin, why can the right hon. Lady not admit in Britain what is widely acknowledged on the continent—that Mr. Prodi is a committed "federast", who is determined to create a single defence policy, a single economic policy, a single foreign policy, a single immigration policy, a single social policy, a single constitution, a single Government and a single state called Europe?

Ms Quin: First, I remind the hon. Gentleman that the appointment of Mr. Prodi at the Berlin Council was linked firmly with Commission reform, and that is why he received the support of all member Governments. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman obviously has a short memory. I am not sure whether he was in the House when Romano Prodi's predecessor was appointed, but I remember the press coverage at the time about the fiercely federalist Jacques Santer, who was the Conservative Government's appointee.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Does the Minister agree that, in taking forward the essential reform process, we must establish a mechanism whereby individual acts of proven misconduct against individual Commissioners can result in their disciplining or dismissal? We should not always have to take the nuclear option of forcing the entire European Commission to resign.

Ms Quin: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. We must not only move ahead in appointing a new Commission, but consider the terms and conditions that govern such appointments in order to address some of the issues to which my hon. Friend referred.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Mr. Prodi has declared his intention to use his presidency to create a single economy and a single political unity; yet the Foreign Secretary said recently that the Maastricht treaty was a high water mark of integrationism. How can those positions be reconciled?

Ms Quin: I am always surprised by the contrast between Opposition Members' present paranoia about the word "integration" and the policies that they adopted in government, which led to much greater integrationism than those that we have pursued. We have said that we will consider proposals on their merits and agree to policies that are in our interests. We have even introduced our own initiatives in the defence sphere, for example. That is the way to proceed in Europe. I urge the right hon. and learned Gentleman to look at the reasons why Mr. Prodi was appointed and the important tasks that we expect him to carry out and about which he will report to the Cologne European Council.

Libya

8. **Mr. Iain Coleman** (Hammersmith and Fulham): If he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with Libya. [79952]

9. **Mr. Russell Brown** (Dumfries): If he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with Libya. [79953]

13. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): When he next plans to meet the United Nations Secretary-General to discuss the handover of the Libyan Lockerbie suspects. [79957]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I welcome the handover of the two Libyans accused of the Lockerbie bombing in response to our initiative to offer a trial before a Scottish court in the Netherlands. I would like to record our warm appreciation for the generous co-operation of the Government of the Netherlands in making that possible and of the United Nations Secretary-General in arranging the handover.

We have since fulfilled our commitment to suspend UN sanctions against Libya. Further steps in our bilateral relations will depend on satisfactory progress with Libya on the case of WPC Fletcher. In the meantime, the breakthrough in the Lockerbie bombing has ended a 10-year diplomatic stalemate and enables us at last to bring before a criminal court this case of mass murder.

Mr. Coleman: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that the most important outcome of this affair is that at last the families of those who were brutally murdered at Lockerbie will be able to see the men accused of that terrible crime stand trial?

Mr. Cook: I have met the relatives in Britain on several occasions in the past two years. I met them again on the day when the two suspects were handed over, and the families expressed their immense relief. Those meetings were difficult because I was unable to share with the relatives the evidence that we hold and the information that we have gathered, because to do so would have prejudiced any future trial. A great advantage of the breakthrough that we have secured is that that evidence and information can come out in open court and be shared with both the relatives and the public.

Mr. Brown: I thank my right hon. Friend for achieving a major success for British diplomacy in ensuring that the two Libyan suspects have been brought forward for trial. The people of Lockerbie realise that, initially,

that development will mean only that the town will, once again, be a focus for the world's media. What comments has my right hon. Friend received from UK business about the lifting of sanctions?

Mr. Cook: I immensely appreciate my hon. Friend's support and constant interest in this case. I am well aware of the dignity and restraint with which his constituents have handled their grief in the past 10 years.

We have not been under great pressure from business on sanctions. Business understands that any active trade promotion must wait for the restoration of full relations with Libya, which in turn requires a resolution of the case of WPC Fletcher. British companies are, on the whole, free to trade with Libya. The UN sanctions have now been lifted, as have many of the European Union sanctions. In those circumstances, I am sure that British business will be seeking opportunities for trade, but the extent to which we can help them will depend on the progress that we make with Libya in the case of WPC Fletcher.

Helen Jones: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on at last ensuring that the case will come to a fair trial, for which the families have long waited. He mentioned the case of WPC Fletcher; until further progress is made on that, normal relations, rightly, cannot be established with Libya. What is being done to make progress in that case so that we can move forward in our relations with Libya?

Mr. Cook: We have had exchanges at official level. Last week, I met a representative of the Libyan Government—the first time in 10 years that a Foreign Minister has done so—at the Stuttgart meeting of the Euro-Med conference. On the margins of the conference, I raised with him our concerns about the case of WPC Fletcher. We are pressing Libya to co-operate with the Metropolitan police inquiry, to accept responsibility for what happened and to make a fresh offer of compensation. I hope that we can maintain that dialogue and reach a conclusion on that matter, so that we can not only resume full relations with Libya, but deal with the concerns of WPC Fletcher's family and her colleagues in the Met.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): What will the Government do if, in the course of the trial in the Netherlands, it appears that the bombing of the aircraft was authorised by the Libyan Government and those who were responsible for the authority being given are still present in the Administration?

Mr. Cook: I make it clear to the House, as I have done throughout the case, that the indictment is of the two accused, whom we sought to stand trial. The charges are against them and it is for the prosecutor and the judges now to proceed with those charges. We have, of course, pressed Libya to recognise that, in the event of those two being found guilty—that is a matter for the court, not the Government—we shall look to Libya for compensation. Libya recognised that in its letter to Kofi Annan. I hope that we shall be able to proceed with the trial in due course. I stress to the House that our obligation as a Government was to secure the surrender of the two accused so that a trial could take place. That will be a free, fair trial, and the Government are not under an obligation to secure one outcome from that trial.

Middle East Peace Process

10. **Mrs. Ann Cryer** (Keighley): If he will make a statement on the declaration on the middle east peace process at the Berlin European Council. [79954]

12. **Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): What assessment he has made of the current situation regarding the middle east peace process. [79956]

16. **Mr. Ernie Ross** (Dundee, West): If he will make a statement on progress with the middle east peace process. [79960]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): The United Kingdom played a leading and positive role in negotiating the text of the European Union declaration on the middle east peace process which issued from the Berlin European Council on 24 and 25 March. The declaration signals to the parties the importance that the European Union attaches to a negotiated settlement.

Together with our EU partners, we remain concerned about the continuing deadlock in the middle east peace process and will seek renewed progress, including progress on Wye implementation, after the Israeli elections, whatever Government emerge from those elections.

Mrs. Cryer: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the UK's contribution to the Berlin declaration on the middle east peace process, and thank him for his constructive comments. Will he give an assurance that, in the months to come, we shall not lose sight of that declaration, particularly its penultimate paragraph which, with Madam Speaker's permission, I shall quote? It says that

"the creation of a democratic, viable and peaceful sovereign Palestinian State on the basis of existing agreements and through negotiations would be the best guarantee of Israel's security and Israel's acceptance as an equal partner in the region."

Mr. Lloyd: I thank my hon. Friend for her opening remarks. Let me make it clear that the United Kingdom, as one of the major parties that worked for the declaration at Berlin, is obviously very much committed to all the sentiments expressed. Certainly, we want a return to a negotiating framework in which the problems between Israel and the Palestine National Authority can be resolved and brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Obviously, within that, although the declaration is deliberately non-prescriptive, it certainly refers to the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, including the option of a state.

Mr. Gerrard: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply to the question about support for the Palestinian right to self-determination, but specifically in respect of Jerusalem, will he confirm that it is still the Government's view that there is no Israeli sovereignty over either east or west Jerusalem, and that the final status of Jerusalem remains open to negotiation as part of the final settlement?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes, I can confirm that the status of Jerusalem is roughly as my hon. Friend set out to the House. We recognise, of course, the de facto control of Israel over west Jerusalem, but we consider east Jerusalem

to be under illegal military occupation. In that context, we do not recognise any de jure sovereignty over the city. The status of Jerusalem has to be determined in the final status talks. We hold that position to be binding on all parties.

Mr. Ross: Will my hon. Friend join me in condemning the recent burst of settlement activity on the west bank and in Gaza, which has been particularly encouraged by the present Israeli Government? Will he comment on US satellite information which suggests that 25 per cent. of existing settlements are uninhabited? Does that not clearly show that the land grab has more to do with affecting the final settlement processes contained in the Oslo accord than with the need for homes?

Mr. Lloyd: I am not in a position to comment on those particular reports. The Berlin declaration calls on all parties to refrain from unilateral actions, which of course include settlement activity. If my hon. Friend is right and some settlements remain unoccupied, that would at least encourage the view that it is possible for the Israeli Government to accept that it is in their own interests now to move forward on the basis that those unilateral actions of further settlement should be avoided. The necessity now is for whichever Government emerge from the coming election to recommit themselves to the negotiating process.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Some months ago, the Israeli Government offered to reduce any military presence that they may have in southern Lebanon if there was an equivalent response from the Syrian Government. Has any progress been made in that regard, or is there any prospect of progress, because surely, demilitarisation of Lebanon would be an important piece in the jigsaw in realising a durable and fair peace settlement in the middle east?

Mr. Lloyd: Of course, existing Security Council resolutions make it clear that southern Lebanon should be vacated by outside military forces. That must remain the position of the British Government. Clearly, we look to the election in Israel to produce a Government who will recommit themselves to a comprehensive package which will include not only southern Lebanon, but negotiations with Syria in respect of the Golan heights.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Further to the question before last, given that the settlement policy is against international law, what representations are the Government making directly to the Israeli Government on this subject?

Mr. Lloyd: The Berlin declaration openly calls for all parties to avoid unilateral actions that could damage the peace process, and it is clear that among those actions would be the continuation of settlement activity. That has been a long-standing demand, not only of this Government, but of the European Union. The Israeli Government, whichever parties they emerge from, can be in no doubt of the position of the international community in the European Union, including Britain, on that issue.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the hon. Gentleman, pursuant to those answers, agree that—especially in light of the admirable Berlin declaration—the continuing behaviour of the Israeli Government in pushing ahead with what are, and are known to be, illegal settlements puts the Israeli Government beyond the pale? After the election, will the Foreign Secretary see to it that there is convened in London a European conference to decide how Europe should move ahead in light of the new elections—perhaps decoupling ourselves slightly from the American process, which has been dismally unsuccessful in the middle east—and promote a European initiative to bring about progress in the middle east, to lead us out of the current impasse?

Mr. Lloyd: I make it clear to the House and to the hon. Gentleman that the Berlin declaration was published when it was in order to ensure that both Palestinians and Israelis were in no doubt about the views of people here in Europe. Those views certainly contained a clear warning against any unilateral actions, and, as I have told the House, the continuation of an illegal settlements policy would be such a unilateral action.

We await the election. We hope that the new Government will commit themselves, and we urge any Government in Israel to recommit themselves, to a negotiated process, because a return to the Wye declaration and the spirit thereof is the only way forward, not simply for the Palestinians but for the people of Israel.

Environmental Protection

17. **Mr. Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What instructions he has given to posts abroad in relation to policy on environmental protection. [79962]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): The environment is an important and increasing priority for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Through our posts abroad, and our role in a wide range of international organisations, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office makes a real contribution to the Government's environmental agenda, which is of course led by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Recent instructions to posts have covered a variety of subjects, from institutional aspects of oceans governance to negotiations on the biosafety protocol and the environmental aspects of the Budget.

Mr. White: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Given that globalisation is still having an adverse effect on many parts of the world—for example, rain forests are still disappearing at an alarming rate—does he agree that there should be widespread reform of global institutions such as the World bank, the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations, to ensure that environmental protection is placed at the top of the agenda?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The need to ensure a greening of global governance is high on the Government's agenda. That includes the international financial institutions, the World bank and the International Monetary Fund. My hon. Friend will be glad to know that precisely those ideas appeared on the agenda of the G8 recently, and that the G8 has called on the IMF and the World bank to consider their own environmental responsibilities. We very strongly support the United

Nations Secretary-General's demand for reform of environmental governance at United Nations level. We are therefore trying to meet my hon. Friend's requests.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): The environment around the Falkland Islands is being devastated by the poaching this year of up to 30,000 tonnes of illegally taken squid. The Falkland Islands Government have had approval for the delivery of a 20 mm weapon, which has suffered lamentable delays. They have put in an application to use a locally available 0.5 inch gun. What instructions has the Foreign Office given the newly appointed governor of the Falkland Islands to save the Falkland Islands environment by arming with locally available weapons?

Mr. Lloyd: Let me say—

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Answer.

Mr. Lloyd: Yes, I will answer. We have given permission for the arming of the naval protection vessel with an appropriate weapon, but the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) and the people of the islands must take into consideration the fact that, although there is a right to protect fishing stocks, and in this instance that right includes permission for the use, under carefully controlled rules of engagement, of a lethal weapon, they also have duties to ensure that any use of force does not go beyond those rules of engagement. Consideration of what are acceptable rules of engagement is obviously central to the deployment of any system. We are working hard and we are in close and detailed discussion with both the Falkland Islands Government and the fishing industry there to ascertain how we can provide a satisfactory framework to deal with poaching. We have, as I have said, already given permission for a cannon to be available for fisheries protection.

St. Helena

20. **Mr. Bob Russell** (Colchester): When he plans to introduce legislation to restore full British citizenship to the people of St. Helena. [79966]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I confirmed in the White Paper last month that we shall be extending British citizenship to all citizens of the overseas territories, including St. Helena. The Government of St. Helena have since expressed their welcome for this. The House will be aware that it is the convention not to announce in advance of the Queen's Speech when parliamentary legislation will be introduced, but we shall seek to do so as soon as practicable.

Mr. Russell: I certainly welcome the Government's best intentions to put right the 18 years of wrongdoing by the previous Government. I think that the 5,500 islanders are looking for the speedy passage of legislation. I would welcome any assistance that the Foreign Secretary can give to put right the 18 years of neglect and rejection of the previous Government.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the number of times that he has raised this issue, which I know is a matter of interest to his constituents who, as I understand it, share the same patron saint, St. Helena. I am glad for the hon. Gentleman's support and I look forward to it when we introduce legislation. It will be a complex and detailed matter, as any nationality legislation must be. However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that, having secured the agreement, we intend to act on it as soon as we can to put right the injustice that we inherited from the previous Administration.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): May I add my warm thanks and my congratulations to my right hon. Friend on making such a decision, not only for the people of St. Helena but for many other people in other overseas territories who wish to take advantage of what is proposed? Does my right hon. Friend have any idea how many citizens in the other overseas territories are saying that they intend to take up this right?

Mr. Cook: We would expect that most of the citizens of the overseas territories would take up the right to British citizenship. That does not mean, of course, that they will wish to take up the right to settle in Britain. We should remember that our overseas territories are now so vigorous and successful in terms of prosperity that most of them enjoy a standard of living that is higher than that of the United Kingdom.

It is not immediately apparent why the residents of Caribbean islands with a higher standard of living than that of people in Britain should necessarily choose to leave their home to come to settle in Britain. However, they will find what we propose an important step in demonstrating that we are as proud of them as they are of their British connections. They will welcome the opportunity to travel freely throughout Europe without going through the non-EU channel when they visit other countries of the European Union.

Visa Applications

21. **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): On what basis he determines the charges for processing visa applications in overseas consulates and embassies. [79967]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): In accordance with Government policy, the visa fee is set so as to allow the full costs of providing the global visa issuing operation to be recovered.

Dr. Harris: In working out what the charges are, do the Government pay any regard to the standard of living in countries where charges are operated or to the quality of decision making, at least on initial application? Some of my constituents have spoken to me about people who have tried to visit them from Russia and South Africa, telling me that the very high charges prevent would-be visitors from applying to visit relatives or fiancés in this country.

Mr. Lloyd: We have a duty to operate a visa regime in a way that is helpful to those wishing to visit this country, but it is legitimate in terms of taxpayers, who gain no direct benefit from the visa regime, that it should recover full costs. Within that context, I understand the

point that the hon. Gentleman makes about charges for unsuccessful visas. However, the cost of processing a visa, whether successful or unsuccessful, is pretty much the same. It would be rather unfair on successful applicants to say that they may have to bear the costs that are borne by those who apply unsuccessfully.

A differential charge for different parts of the world would be quite contentious. It would be a highly subjective matter which areas deserved low-cost visas and which areas should have super-cost visa charges. That would be a little difficult to implement.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I know that my hon. Friend recognises the problems in Pakistan and Bangladesh of getting to Dhaka, Karachi or Islamabad, and the cost involved. What is his opinion of the screening process, which deters many people from submitting a visa application, although they would probably have succeeded if they had gone ahead, as they had a genuine case?

Mr. Lloyd: I know that my hon. Friend has dealt with many such cases over a long period, as I have. He will know that the best advice that he can give to his constituents is to make sure that the application goes in, and that it is submitted on the basis of the fullest possible information. People cannot be advised by Members of Parliament, and certainly not by Ministers, not to submit applications for fear that they might be refused.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Does the Minister find that people who are resident in the United Kingdom are making applications to overseas posts for visas? I have a constituent who has been waiting seven months for his wife's visa to be renewed through the Passport Agency in the UK. The collapse of the IT system there is causing many problems. Will the Minister have urgent discussions with his colleagues in the Home Office to make sure that the renewal of visas for people such as married women who came from Russia is dealt with properly?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. There is no doubt that the Passport Agency is in a state of chaos because of decisions made by the previous Government on these matters. I undertake to draw the attention of my hon. Friends at the Home Office to the points that the hon. Gentleman makes to see whether there is an easy resolution. However, I remind him that, as a supporter of the previous Government, he might consider his own responsibility and perhaps say to his constituents that he is sorry.

Chile

23. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): How many Ministers of the Government of Chile have visited his Department since 2 May 1997. [79969]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): We are aware of eight visits by Chilean Ministers during this period. I have met the Foreign Minister, José Miguel Insulza, and the Deputy Foreign Minister, Mariano Fernandez. I meet José Miguel Insulza again tomorrow for breakfast.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is the Foreign Secretary aware that only two of Her Majesty's Ministers have visited Chile since his Government came to power—the noble Lord Clinton-Davis and the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd)? Is it not the case that, if rather more Ministers had visited, there would be a better understanding of that country as it now is, rather than a mentality locked in the 1960s and early 1970s? Is it not the case that Chile desires good relations with the United Kingdom four times as much as Britain does with Chile?

Mr. Cook: As I said, I have already met both Foreign Ministers of Chile, and I meet the senior one again tomorrow. We have had regular contact and dialogue with them, and we have encouraged them also to understand the nature of modern Britain, where the rule of law applies and the Government intend to uphold the due judicial process. This is the umpteenth time at Question Time that the hon. Gentleman has invited us to depart from the due legal process, which we have no intention of doing.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): When my right hon. Friend has met Chilean Ministers, have they said that they are grateful to this country for the way in which, in 1974, when a Labour Government were elected, we gave asylum to so many Chileans who were fleeing from the terror following the coup of 1973? Is that not a great tribute to our country? Is it not a fact that those who found asylum in Britain at the time well understand what is happening and want the rule of law to continue?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. The decision taken by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was taken in a quasi-judicial role and with the strict application of the legal rules. It was not taken in response to public opinion. However, if we are being invited to have regard to public opinion in Chile, it is important for the House to recognise that there is more than one opinion in Chile. The last opinion poll in Chile found that the public were split down the middle on whether it was right for Senator Pinochet to be detained in the United Kingdom for extradition and trial in Europe.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): When the Foreign Secretary has breakfast with the Chilean Minister tomorrow morning, will he make it clear that it would have been lawful for the Home Secretary to exercise his discretion so that Senator Pinochet could be returned to Chile? Will he also make it clear that he will raise a protest over the stopping of LanChile flights to the Falkland Islands at the end of last month as a direct result of the Government's treatment of visitors to this country from Chile? The matter is of great concern to the Falkland islanders, who believe that the Government have sacrificed them on the altar of their own incompetence.

Mr. Cook: LanChile's decision was a decision made by LanChile as a company, not by the Chilean Government—and the Chilean Government have no right to order it to resume a service, any more than I have the right to order any airline to resume a service.

As for the hon. Lady's wider point, the Home Secretary made a decision involving strict application of the legal rules, having regard to the due process, and rightly decided that this was a matter for the courts, not politicians, to decide. There was a time when the

Conservative party prided itself on the rule of law; that pride deserts it when the rule of law is applied to one of its own political cronies.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The relationship between the House of Commons and the courts is always very delicate. May I refer to questions 8, 9 and 13, which dealt with Lockerbie? We shall have to study what was actually said in *Hansard*, but it seemed to some of us who have spoken to the lawyers acting for Pan Am's executors, and to Professor Black, the professor of Scots law, that to say much about this subject is sailing very close to the wind. Will you reflect on what was said, Madam Speaker, and possibly make some ruling on what can be said in the House in future? After all, a trial is about to start at Zeist.

Madam Speaker: I was conscious of the exchanges that took place today, and I very much doubt that they offended against the sub judice rule—if, indeed, such a rule applies. The hon. Gentleman is quite right, however: I want to give some careful thought to the matter, and I hope that he will allow me to do so.

Freedom of Tax Information

3.32 pm

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Government to issue taxpayers with an annual schedule detailing the taxes they have paid compared with previous years and to require information concerning the taxable component of prices on products sold to be made available.

I am currently engaged in a detailed questionnaire exercise in my constituency. One of the questions that I ask is whether constituents think that they are paying more tax now than they were two years ago. Most say yes, and of course they are right, but a great many say that they do not know. It is very complicated to make proper comparisons.

Until a few years ago, I completed my own tax returns. Despite having spent 15 years working in the financial services industry advising clients on investment matters, I now have to employ an expensive accountant to do it for me. The titanic complications of the capital gains tax system resulting from last year's Budget were the last straw. Last week, a large package from the Inland Revenue landed on my doormat with a resounding thud. It contained a 12-page tax return, a 40-page guide to filling in the tax return and an eight-page help sheet, as well as separate forms for parliamentary calculations, sundry other advice forms and—the final straw—a sheet of helpful hints from a bowler-hatted "Hector the tax inspector" pushing a particularly archaic-looking lawnmower bearing the logo "Self Assessment—A clearer tax system".

In fact, it is about as clear as mud. I have little idea of how much tax I have paid or am due to pay; I have little idea whether I shall be paying more tax this year than last year, in gross terms or as a percentage of my earnings, let alone all the stealth taxes used increasingly liberally by the Government. The plethora of forms gives me no indication of how the total Government tax revenue is made up, or of how it is then spent.

I believe that the system has become far too complex for the ordinary man or woman in the street, who will have little chance of making a fair assessment of whether he or she faces an increasing tax bill, in what form the taxes are paid and in what areas the tax revenues are spent.

I believe that it is the basic right of all taxpayers who contribute to the national Exchequer to have easy and transparent access to that information, so that they can make informed choices about what to spend their money on and on whether the tax record of the Government of the day matches up with the rhetoric of the tax policies promised.

This year's Budget underlined the confusion and arbitrariness of the whole system. Indeed, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer seem to have been particular victims of that confusion and complexity. Before the election, the Prime Minister assured us categorically that Labour had "no plans to increase tax at all". Before the Budget, he tried to claim that it had not, but on 3 March he was forced to admit that

"the tax burden will increase over this Parliament".—[*Official Report*, 3 March 1999; Vol. 326, c. 1075–76.]

Indeed, we have calculated that it will increase by £41 billion as a result of Budget announcements made so far.

On Budget day, the Chancellor claimed that the Budget offered "tax cuts for business". Simultaneously, the president of the Confederation of British Industry maintained that

"over the next four years as a result of Budgets which we've seen in the last two years, we are going to face something like a £20 billion increase in business taxation."

The Adam Smith Institute has calculated that tax-freedom day has been delayed by a further two days this year, to 27 May, as a result of Budget increases by stealth. Incidentally, tax-freedom day comes as soon as 9 May in the United States, but as late as 21 June in the eurozone.

The truth is that people are being deceived by a Government who pretend that taxes have not gone up by pointing to the headline rates of tax while the overall tax burden goes on rising by stealth. The overall burden, rather than just the rate, is all-important and difficult to extrapolate.

Tables available from the House of Commons Library reveal about 300 different types of taxes and reliefs available to the Chancellor to alter at his will: 25 main headings, under "Public Sector Current Receipts", which include the usual suspects such as income tax and corporation tax; 83 "Principal Tax Expenditures and Structural Reliefs", ranging from exemption from value added tax on burials and cremations to—hon. Members should just wait—VAT refunds to the BBC and ITN when that tax is incurred on non-business purchases; 42 minor tax allowances; and 146 tax allowances and reliefs for which the Government do not know the cost, ranging from the exemption for agricultural societies on profits of shows to gains on sales of motor cars.

In short, there are about 300 ways to skin a cat. This Chancellor has been doing a lot of skinning by stealth—not to mention fleecing, too. It is no surprise, therefore, that, after the use of smoke and mirrors which reclassified the treatment of the abolition of mortgage interest relief at source and the introduction of the working families tax credit in particular, the Select Committee on the Treasury criticised the Chancellor's use of selective figures and called for clear tables showing the cumulative effect of tax changes and the separate effects of new announcements. As the *Financial Times* put it, more succinctly:

"Government spin does not always stand up to scrutiny."

My Bill therefore proposes three main measures. The first is an annual tax and spend statement. Each taxpayer would be entitled to receive an annual statement of how much income tax and national insurance he or she has paid and on what that money is being spent. The statement would have to be clear, concise and user-friendly. The aim would be to provide people with objective and useful information so that they can better understand how much they contribute each year to the provision of public services and how the Government are spending that money.

The second measure is the requirement for the Government to establish an independent Budget office. It would scrutinise and audit the contents of the Budget and other documents and statements made by the Treasury. It has become almost impossible to trace tax changes

[Mr. Tim Loughton]

over years. To rebuild public trust, I believe that an independent body is required to audit the Budget's contents and ensure consistent methodology and presentation of figures.

Thirdly, the Government would be required to institute ways of ensuring that the amount of tax that people pay for goods—particularly road fuel, alcohol and tobacco—is clearly displayed at the point of sale. It has taken the recent furore over the penal increases in petrol and diesel duty and the uncompetitive extension of the fuel escalator, all under the dubious guise of environmental taxation, to alert the public to the fact that, typically, 85 per cent. of the price of a litre of fuel represents tax. A litre of fuel costs 67p and 57p of that is derived from duty and VAT; only 10p is for the petrol.

A packet of cigarettes costs £3.69, 82 per cent. of which is accounted for by duty and VAT, so just 68p of that sum is for the cigarettes. Similarly, 66 per cent. of the price of a bottle of spirits is made up of tax. I believe that consumers should have easy access to those figures, which should be clearly and unequivocally presented, rather than having the money removed from their pockets by stealth. That is achievable, without loading prohibitive extra costs on retailers—most obviously by including details of the tax element on till receipts at the point of sale, which would require only minimal adaptations of cash tills.

Producers and retailers have welcomed the idea. The Petrol Retailers Association has said that it

"would most certainly be interested in a more open approach being taken to highlighting the total amount of taxation included in the retail price of commodities".

The Automobile Association's "Fair Deal for Motorists" campaign seeks to give drivers access to that taxation information, and the Scotch Whisky Association says that the campaign to highlight the tax element in the cost of alcoholic drinks is a matter that it has been pursuing for a number of years.

The aim of the Bill is simple and achievable, at minimal cost, but with enormous benefits to the ordinary taxpaying members of the public, who have a right to easy access to clear information about where their taxes are going and where they are levied.

Raising the tax threshold by stealth, as the Government have become increasingly adept at doing, means dishonest tax. My Bill seeks nothing more than freedom of information for the public, enabling them to make informed choices and comparisons.

The Government have declared that they are committed to freedom of information, so I hope that they will be able to support my own amateur home-grown effort and hasten its passage on to the statute book, ahead of their own long-awaited opus on the subject.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Tim Loughton, Mr. Francis Maude, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory, Mr. John Whittingdale, Mr. Nick Gibb, Mr. Archie Norman, Mr. Howard Flight, Mr. Dominic Grieve, Mr. Robert Syms, Mr. Andrew Tyrie and Mrs. Ann Winterton.

Freedom of Tax Information

Mr. Tim Loughton accordingly presented a Bill to require the Government to issue taxpayers with an annual schedule detailing the taxes they have paid compared with previous years and to require information concerning the taxable component of prices on products sold to be made available: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 May, and to be printed [Bill 85].

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

[Relevant document: The Fourth Report from the Treasury Committee, Session 1998–99, on the 1999 Budget (HC 325).]

Order for Second Reading read.

3.42 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alan Milburn): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is the third Finance Bill of this Parliament, and it builds on our previous two Bills in reforming and strengthening the British economy. It implements the most recent Budget delivered by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer—a Budget that rewards work and enterprise, rewards families and will help to deliver a stronger economic future for our country.

The Budget will do that by locking in the economic stability that the Government have been creating over the past two years. Our approach has been right and necessary. When we came to office, we inherited an economy that was going off the rails. The national debt had doubled, the public finances were spiralling out of control, inflation was back in the system, and the economy was fundamentally weakened—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] The Tories do not like hearing that, but it is true. The economy was fundamentally weakened after two decades of Tory boom and bust.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Is the Minister aware that, in the 1960s and 1970s, the British economy grew at about two thirds the average rate of those of our European competitors, whereas, in the 1980s and 1990s, it grew faster than our European competitors' average? Does he think that that had nothing to do with the reforms that Conservative Governments made over 20 years?

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Where did they go wrong?

Mr. Milburn: As my hon. Friend asks, why, then, did the Conservatives go so badly wrong? I remind the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) that they inflicted on this country the two deepest and most damaging recessions that this country has ever seen. Only a Tory party as out of touch with reality as the modern Conservatives could describe that pitiful history as a golden economic legacy.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: Talking of golden economic legacies.

Mr. Bercow: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that every Labour Government in history, without exception, have left office with levels of taxation and unemployment higher than those that they inherited. If the right hon. Gentleman is so cocksure about the future, is he prepared today to guarantee that this Government will be the exception, and that when they eventually leave office—sooner rather than later—taxation and unemployment rates will be lower than they those that they inherited?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is an assiduous attender of these debates, and I can tell him that we would be pleased to match our record against that of his party any day. We would be pleased in particular to contrast our record on tax promises with that of Conservative Governments. I remind him that the Labour party keeps its tax promises, whereas his party breaks such promises.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I marvel at my right hon. Friend's patience. I urge him to tell the official Opposition that, in two short years in the 1980s, the policies of Mrs. Thatcher, Keith Joseph and Geoffrey Howe led to Britain losing 2.5 million jobs. Will he please remind the Opposition of that?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend represents a constituency that is thankfully still rich in manufacturing companies, and he knows fine well that what those companies most dread is a return to the days of the 1980s and early 1990s when a million manufacturing jobs were lost, manufacturing output declined by 8 per cent. and manufacturing investment fell by a quarter. Those companies know that, far from leaving a golden economic legacy, the policies of Conservative Governments fundamentally weakened the British economy.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, under the previous Government, industry was decimated, particularly in the west midlands; unemployment reached record levels; and, more importantly, people suffered from negative equity, which Opposition Members have failed to mention?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. During the 1980s and early 1990s, inflation and interest rates were in double figures. Indeed, interest rates were at 15 per cent. for a full year. Tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of home owners who had voted Conservative because they believed the promises that the Tories had given, found themselves with negative equity, as my hon. Friend said.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Does the Chief Secretary agree that, when the Government took office, they took over the tax plans of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)? Those plans, together with my right hon. and learned Friend's plans for the economy, delivered inflation at the target rate of 2.5 per cent., which increased tax flows, and imposed the constraints on public expenditure. They amounted to the golden economic legacy.

Mr. Milburn: The right hon. Gentleman feels that he must defend his own legacy, because he was a Treasury Minister at the time and I shadowed him in that job. I remind him that, if the Tories had got back into power on 1 May 1997, the tax projections in the final Budget proposed by him and his right hon. and learned Friend would have landed the British people with a higher tax burden than they will pay this year, next year or the year after.

[Mr. Milburn]

Not all Conservatives have been as reticent about the past as those who have spoken this afternoon. The recently announced Scottish Tory party manifesto was a model of the new confessional style of Conservatism, about which we have heard much from the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague).

Madam Speaker: Order. We have had a robust exchange to begin with, and I have enjoyed it enormously. I hope that we can now get to the Finance Bill.

Mr. Milburn: I fear that I was provoked, Madam Speaker. You are quite right to correct me.

In the past two years, we have been putting the economic fundamentals in place for lasting, long-term prosperity. Inflation is now under control, long-term interest rates are at their lowest level in decades, mortgages have not been cheaper for more than 30 years, youth and long-term unemployment rates have halved, and a record number of people are in work—over 400,000 more than at the time of the general election.

Public finances have been transformed and this Finance Bill continues that process of transformation. We have cut public sector borrowing by some £30 billion, so that the Government are now living within their means, but we have been able to give hospitals and schools the biggest increase in extra funding they have ever seen—increases that were opposed by the Conservatives as reckless. What the Tories now need to declare is whether they think that the further increases in funding that we announced in the Budget and that are taken forward in the Bill are also reckless. Is it reckless to invest an extra £60 million in school books? Is it reckless to spend an extra £170 million on tackling and preventing crime, or to invest an extra £470 million on spreading the benefits of computer learning to every community in the land? Is it reckless to invest extra resources—an additional £430 million on modernising hospital accident and emergency departments and making access to primary care services in the community faster and easier? If the Tories think that it is, they should have the courage of their convictions and they should say so.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): It is not reckless, if one has the money. Of course one has the money if one is prepared to take it, for example, from some of the poorest pensioners. Even if the amount taken is very small, it is still a high percentage of their income.

Mr. Milburn: In that case, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the £1 billion package that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget for those pensioners, including a dramatic increase in the amount of money to help them with their winter fuel bills.

Dr. Godman: May I make a plea for a more sympathetic tax regime for our much reduced merchant shipping fleet? I know that Lord Alexander is carrying out a study of that issue, but were a more favourable tax regime to be introduced more ships would come under the British flag, more British sailors and officers would be recruited and our nautical colleges would receive a fillip.

Mr. Milburn: Those points are well made by my hon. Friend. They are precisely the sort of points that Lord Alexander will examine in his inquiry into the reliefs and support that we should give to the merchant fleet, now and in the future.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) on a tonnage system for taxation of shipping, on which I tabled a new clause at the Report stage of the previous Finance Bill. I hope that the Government pay attention to that point, because there was much sympathy for it in the House. I also hope that the Government will start to unravel the unfair system of long-term capital allowances, which were introduced in the previous Government's last Finance Bill.

Mr. Milburn: I shall ensure that the hon. member's comments and those made by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) are passed to Lord Alexander, who has now begun his inquiry and will report in due course. The approach that we are taking is prudent and disciplined. We are locking in stability by keeping the public finances under control. Over the next five years, there will be a current budget surplus of some £34 million. This Government's approach will allow us to meet our tough fiscal rules while at the same time providing a £6 billion boost to the economy at just the point in the cycle at which it is most needed.

The Government are steering a course for stability in what is an uncertain and troubled global economy, but stability is a means, not an end. It is the essential precondition for economic prosperity and progress. In the Finance Bill, we build on that platform of stability to improve the productivity performance of the economy for the long term. For too long, Britain has faced a competitiveness gap with our competitors. There is now a 40 per cent. performance gap between the UK and the United States of America and a 20 per cent. gap between us and France and Germany. This Finance Bill will help tackle that productivity problem. It does so by taking forward measures to improve investment, to strengthen the links between business and education and to improve the tax position of growing firms.

Clause 69, for example, extends capital allowances to help bridge the investment gap that has opened up between Britain and our competitors. Too many British firms find themselves outgunned by higher levels of investment in plant and machinery among their overseas competitors. In the most recent international business cycle, for every £100 per worker invested in the UK, the US and Germany invested £140, and France invested almost £150.

We have listened carefully to representations from business organisations and have decided to continue enhanced first-year capital allowances to help small and medium-sized firms to grow and to invest. Similarly, clause 53 provides tax relief for companies seconding staff to schools, colleges and universities. It is part of our wider effort to bridge the gap between business and education.

We believe that education and business working together in partnership have a vital role in helping to prepare young people for the world of work. During our pre-Budget consultation with businesses, we found enthusiastic support from firms of all shapes and sizes for a measure that will help business shape the future work

force that it will need. It is another small, but significant, step towards making Britain a modern, high-skill, high-learning and high-earning economy, whose success will be due to the investment that we make in the quality of our work force.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Milburn: No. I have given way several times and I must press on.

Success will rely also on giving businesses the right incentives to invest. Clauses 24 to 26 reform the corporation tax system to give Britain the lowest rates of company taxes in our history. Indeed, those clauses give Britain the lowest company tax rate of any major European country and the lowest rate of any major industrialised nation in the world. Moreover, these new rates—of 30p, 20p and 10p—will not apply just for one year. They, or lower rates still, will apply for the rest of this Parliament. They are evidence of this Government's determination to make Britain the best place for business investment.

The new 10p rate of corporation tax for small companies in particular halves their tax rate and will benefit almost 270,000 growing firms. Two in three companies that pay tax will benefit. Those fundamental changes will leave more money in the hands of those who are best placed to create wealth and to create jobs.

These enterprise initiatives are complemented by the other measures announced in the Budget. They include a new research and development tax credit for firms with the brightest ideas and the best potential, new rewards for the best entrepreneurs and new incentives for the best investors. There will also be a new Small Business Service, to provide help for those firms that will be the biggest source of new job opportunities in the future.

The Bill builds on the platform of stability that the Government are creating by helping to develop an economy that is based on enterprise and knowledge. However, it also recognises that our country cannot have an enterprise economy without also developing a fair society. The one sustains the other. We cannot have a successful economy without a fair society, in which the talents of all our people are deployed to the full: nor can we have a fair society without a successful economy in which wealth creation provides the surest foundation for job creation.

The Bill takes forward measures to modernise and make fairer the whole tax system. Taxes are being cut for low and middle-income families. More than that: according to the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies, people in every decile group—from bottom to top—will gain from the measures. These are tax cuts for the many, not just for the few. The average household will be £380 a year better off, and the tax burden on the average family will fall to below 20 per cent. for the first time in more than 20 years. However, these are not just tax cuts. They are tax reforms, too. They are tax cuts for a purpose: to reward work, enterprise and families. In our previous two Budgets, we developed new measures to help people move from welfare to work. Now we are taking that fundamental reform a stage further by ensuring that work pays. For years, successive Governments have taken too much tax from those who work hard but are by no means wealthy. For years, successive Governments of both persuasions connived in the situation where the working poor, facing marginal tax rates sometimes in excess of 100 per cent., were penalised simply for trying to move off benefit.

The Finance Bill, with the Government's other measures, such as the minimum wage and the working families tax credit—both opposed by the Conservatives—begin to end the perverse incentives that encourage benefit dependency. Instead, it aims to encourage independence by allowing working families to keep more of their income rather than paying it out in taxes. We do so in the recognition that work is the best way out of poverty and that, for too many people, financial uncertainty has acted as a real barrier to work for far too long.

Clause 20 introduces the lowest starting rate of income tax the country has seen for 35 years. The new 10p rate on the first £1,500 of income will halve the tax rate for almost 2 million people, most of them low-paid. Our reforms to national insurance will lift almost 1 million people out of paying contributions at all. From next April, every basic rate and top-rate taxpayer will benefit from our 1p reduction in income tax. On any count, those are major reforms to the tax system.

Mr. Bercow: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Milburn: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman already; I am counting.

Our reforms will make working families better off and, in contrast to the practice of the Conservative party in power, the tax cuts honour our promises at the general election.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I assure the Chief Secretary that I am listening carefully to what he says and agree with his broad thrust. Does he accept that he could have done more to increase the personal allowance so that people at the bottom end pay tax at a lower level: not at 25 per cent. but at 50 per cent. of the average wage, as was the case at the end of the war? Why should people on the minimum wage still be paying tax not only now, but for the foreseeable future under this Government?

Mr. Milburn: I hear that from the Liberal Democrats consistently. We carefully compared their policy of increasing the allowances with our policy of introducing the 10p rate. In terms of benefit to the low-paid and the worst-off, there is no comparison at all. The biggest gains go to the lowest-paid as a consequence of the introduction of the 10p rate. The hon. Gentleman may argue about it, but that is the situation.

I say to the Conservative party that, by introducing the 10p rate, we have honoured the pledges that we gave at the general election. We said that we would not increase the top or basic rates of income tax. We have honoured that pledge. We said that we would not extend VAT to food, children's clothes, books, newspapers, and public transport fares. We have honoured that pledge, too. We said that we would cut VAT on fuel and we have done so. We also said that we would introduce the 10p rate. We have now done that too, and millions of families will see the benefit in their pay packets from next month.

[Mr. Milburn]

We said that we would do something else as well. We said that we would give more support to families. The record rises in child benefit are a reminder that it is Labour that increases support for families with children and the Conservative party that freezes it. It is Labour that will pay up to an extra £416 a year into the pay packets of families with children. The new children's tax credit in clause 27 provides most help to those who need it most, when they need it most: families when they are bringing up children. We have been able to do that by abolishing the married couples allowance and related allowances and focusing their help where it is most needed.

Our reforms to child support have been widely welcomed as a decisive step to tackling the disgrace of child poverty in Britain. I remind the House that the Child Poverty Action Group, for example, said the day after the Budget:

"The Chancellor has proved today that he supports the family and is genuine in his commitment to end child poverty".

The National Council for One Parent Families said:

"This is a clear-thinking, modernising Budget which will help direct help where it is most needed: to families with children, especially those in poverty."

In total, 700,000 children will be taken out of poverty by the measures that we are taking.

Almost the only organisation that opposes the new children's tax credit is the Conservative party, despite what the Leader of the Opposition said in his freedom and the family speech just last year. Then he said:

"If we were going to phase out the married couples allowance we should have replaced it at the same time with a new allowance, better targeted on families who really need the help."

We have delivered precisely what the right hon. Gentleman was calling for, but of course that was then; that was a year ago. The Tories are now singing a different tune. Now they oppose the abolition of the married couples allowance, despite the fact that they repeatedly cut it when they were in office, more than halving its value for some people. They had a Chancellor of the Exchequer who described the allowance as an anomaly. They allowed the MCA to be available to people whether they were married or not, separated or not, or had children or not. It is as if collective amnesia has taken hold of the entire Conservative party.

I know that the former Chancellor Lord Lamont said that the Conservatives were a party in office, not in power, but they cannot wash their hands of all responsibility for what they did while they formed the Government of the day. That is precisely what they are trying to do now. Tory political amnesia is not confined to only one part of the Bill. The same symptoms of doing one thing in office and saying another out of it are evident in the Conservatives' approach to the fuel duty escalator. They huff and puff and complain about it now, but there was no huffing or complaining when they were in office, or when they introduced it. Indeed, the shadow Chief Secretary, the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), was a Treasury Minister at the very time.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I remind that right hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members of the warning issued by the then Tory Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), about the escalator—the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) should listen to this. He said:

"Any critic of the Government's tax plans who claims also to support the international agreement to curb carbon dioxide emissions will be sailing dangerously near to hypocrisy."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 939.]

Mrs. Winterton: The Chief Secretary obviously has a very short memory. When the Conservative party was in government, it introduced the tax to which he referred at 5 per cent. per annum. The Labour Government have put the tax up to 6 per cent. in each and every Budget, which is three Budgets in two years. They have done it at a time when derv is much cheaper on the continent than in the UK. That is why the road haulage industry is thinking of flagging out. The right hon. Gentleman ought to be consistent in what he says.

Mr. Milburn: If I were the hon. Lady, I would be extremely cautious. She should look at the figures. Since the general election, the fuel duty escalator that we have imposed on diesel has led to an increase of 7p per litre. The Conservatives increased the price of derv by 26p per litre. I also remind the hon. Lady of the other measures that the Government have taken to help Britain's haulage industry. We have frozen vehicle excise duty for 98 per cent. of lorries. We have doubled VED reductions for the cleanest lorries and we have widened the differential between cleaner diesel and ordinary derv. And, of course, the cuts in corporation tax will benefit haulage firms, just as they will benefit other firms.

Even at this stage, it is not too late for the hon. Lady and her party to say now what they said when the Conservatives were in office—that the escalator is a necessary environmental measure that will help Britain meet our international legal obligations and contribute to better air quality in our country. The Tories should be supporting the escalator duty now rather than opposing it, but their opposition to the Bill speaks more of them than it does of the Government. They failed in government, just as they are now failing in opposition. They failed to keep their promises then and they are failing to maintain their policies now. They say that they want to put their past mistakes behind them, but their opposition to the Bill shows that they have failed to learn any lessons from their defeat in May 1997. Isolated in Britain and determined to isolate Britain in Europe, they have put themselves on the margins of British politics. They are incapable of knowing what is good for Britain because they are so out of touch with the British people.

The Conservative party belongs to the past. By contrast, the Labour Government are delivering for the future. The Bill will help to build a stronger economic future for our country; it will help to create an enterprise economy and a fair society in which there is opportunity for the many and not merely for the few. The Bill provides the right incentives for people to work and for businesses to invest. It offers a better deal for British business and a better deal for the British people. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.11 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Finance Bill because it imposes further hidden taxes on families, on homeowners, on motorists, on consumers and on business, adding extra costs to business at a time of economic uncertainty and rising unemployment and fails to reverse the damaging measures introduced by the last two Finance Acts which introduced similar damaging and hidden tax increases together with increases in the tax burden on companies and tax rises on savings and on pension funds."

There was nothing new in the Chief Secretary's speech, but there is something new in the Finance Bill this year. It begins, on its introductory page, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's assertion that it is compatible with the European convention on human rights. It is just as well for the Government that the provisions of that convention do not include the right of the public to honest and straightforward accounts and descriptions of the amounts that they will be paying in the coming year. The whole Budget exercise—from Budget day to the Finance Bill—has been a story of half-truths, fiddled descriptions and cooked statistics. We heard some more of those in the Chief Secretary's speech today.

The story began in the Chancellor's speech on Budget day, but was heard in the Prime Minister's words the following day when he told the House that there was

"a net tax cut of £4.5 billion."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 358.]

That is a complete invention. If we try to piece the crime together from the Red Book, it seems that what the Prime Minister did, and what the Treasury is still trying to do, is to reclassify all the spending measures in the Budget table as tax reductions; they have reclassified all the spending measures as negative taxes. One can take an example more or less at random; there is a pledge of an extra £5 million a year for green transport plans. We might think that an extra £5 million a year is a pretty insulting amount to set beside the £1.7 billion that the Government are raising in this Budget alone from extra fuel duty. However, the point is that that extra expenditure on green taxation is classified not as an expenditure measure, but as a reduction in taxation. That is how the Government and the Prime Minister arrived at that £4.5 billion tax cut.

It was not only the Prime Minister; in the Budget debate of the following week, the Chief Secretary referred to a £4 billion tax reduction—he lost £0.5 billion somewhere during that week, which the Chancellor does not care much about. However, there is no possible way that the Budget and the Finance Bill can be construed as cutting taxes on anything like that scale. Indeed, the House of Commons Library has described it as, in total, a tax increase measure of £200 million over the next three years.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether his party's policy is now to abandon the fuel escalator and so achieve the tax reductions he seeks?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, it is our policy to abandon the fuel escalator, and I shall talk about that later.

I am dwelling—perhaps to the embarrassment of Treasury Ministers—on the fact that they have fiddled the figures so as to try to dress up a tax-raising Budget as a tax-reducing Budget. They did so on a spectacular scale by classifying the working families tax credit not as an expenditure item, but as a reduction in taxation. I do not ask the House to accept my word for that: the Chief Secretary, in an answer to a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), confirmed that the WFTC is an expenditure item and should be classified as such.

The Chief Secretary has broken his own rules by permitting the Prime Minister and his colleagues to claim a tax reduction. If the right hon. Gentleman goes on like that, he will end up describing the extra cost of the war in Kosovo not as an expenditure item, but as a tax reduction. Does he have any idea how much damage he does to the cause of transparency and honesty in public accounting by abusing his own definitions in the way I have described?

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): The right hon. Gentleman appears to be arguing that, if one looks in the Red Book and adds up the figures, one will conclude that a benefit is the same as a tax reduction. However, if he leaves the Red Book for a moment, visits my constituency and meets some of the young people who have passed through the gateway to the Government's new deal and who are now going into work, he will notice that there is a great difference between a benefit and a tax credit. A tax credit gives a person an incentive to return to work that a benefit does not give. The whole thrust of the Finance Bill is to give people an incentive to work and to reward work, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that that is the reason why some of the changes have been made.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I agree that there is a big difference between a benefit and a tax cut; our point is that the Government are deliberately confusing the two. It is not me but the Chief Secretary who calls the WFTC an expenditure item, but the right hon. Gentleman has not followed that through in the presentation of his figures, on the basis of which he claims that the Budget is a tax-cutting Budget. I strongly support the Bill presented to the House earlier this afternoon by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton). It is designed to put some honesty and straightforwardness back into the presentation of the national accounts.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): In the spirit of transparency and honesty, will the right hon. Gentleman now explain which tax he would increase, or which section of expenditure he would reduce, so as to recover the £1.6 billion lost by getting rid of the fuel escalator, which is now Conservative party policy?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the hon. Lady will wait, I shall explain. One of the items that I intended to raise later was the Government's failure to reform the welfare state as they promised. The House will remember that the Prime Minister promised to fund the extra expenditure on health and education by reforming the welfare state, as the Conservative Government had been doing. In the last three years of our Administration, the Conservatives achieved a flat expenditure profile on social security expenditure: it went up in real terms by a total of 1.5 per cent. over those three years. That contrasts with

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

the 3 per cent. annual real-terms increase to which we have now returned. If the Labour Government had continued the successful reforms that the Conservatives had implemented, there would be plenty of money available to use an alternative to the tax-raising measures that I criticise.

Mr. Bercow: Does my right hon. Friend recall that, writing in *The Times* of 11 March this year, the respected economic commentator Anatole Kaletsky dismissed the Government's claims for the Budget as "simply false"? Mr. Kaletsky went on to say:

"As shown unambiguously in the Government's own Budget Statement, taxes have risen in each of the past two years and will rise even more in the next financial year."

That is surely clear beyond doubt—even to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is entirely and absolutely correct. The Treasury Committee reached a similar conclusion. The Committee—which has a distinguished Labour Chairman, the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), and a Labour majority—deliberated about the precise matter to which my hon. Friend referred, and concluded:

"The tax burden will increase during the coming financial year."

The Committee echoed the evidence given by Andrew Dilnot, the director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, who said:

"the aggregate tax burden is certainly rising."

People want to know whether their tax burden will be higher next year than it was last year. The fact is that, according to independent commentators and a Committee of the House, the tax burden is increasing and will continue to increase next year.

Mr. Ian Bruce: When the Government came to power, they introduced a utilities tax—the so-called windfall tax—to retain the totals and make it appear as though taxes were not rising. More important, has my right hon. Friend noticed that, although the new deal—which has operated for a whole year for 18 to 24-year-olds—reduced youth unemployment in the Government's first year, it is now rising again? The Government have taxed the utilities, wasted the money and put more people out of work.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is correct. All the make-work and employment schemes in the world do not compensate for a job market that is going in the wrong direction. If one taxes businesses excessively, one will create fewer jobs. It is quite simple, and my hon. Friend is right to draw that fact to the attention of the House. The only people who do not understand are those sitting on the Government Benches. The truth has been revealed: this is a tax-raising Chancellor and a tax-raising Government, it was a tax-raising Budget, and we now have before us a tax-raising Finance Bill—and we will oppose them all.

One would not know all that if one were to rely on the propagandist leaflet published by the Treasury on Budget day. Some 1.5 million copies of the pamphlet, called "Budget 99", were printed and circulated. A post office in my constituency has refused to distribute the leaflet on the ground that that would be in breach of its contract with the Post Office not to deal in partisan and party political literature.

The postmaster in my constituency has spotted several curious omissions and misleading statements in that leaflet. For instance, it asserts that the 10p starting rate applies to the first £1,500 of income. That is flatly untrue—we did not discover that from the Chancellor on Budget day, but we have since read the Red Book and the small print. We now know that all those who rely on savings—and the Government are trying to encourage people to save—will continue to pay tax not at the new 10p rate but at the rate of 20p on that band of income.

The Government have compounded that injustice by failing completely in the Finance Bill to reverse the injustice already referred to whereby 300,000 non-taxpaying pensioners will not receive their dividend tax credits. That scandal remains uncorrected. The Government are compensating better-off savers and taxpayers for the withdrawal of dividend tax credits. However, those who, by definition, are the poorest savers—those who do not pay tax—will not receive from April this year any of the dividend tax credits.

The Chancellor and the Treasury leaflet also misdescribed the nature of the 10p tax band in another respect because they did not refer to the fact that, although the Government are introducing a 10p band, they are abolishing the 20p band. More than 4 million people will now be paying a higher marginal income tax rate of 23 per cent. instead of the previous rate of 20 per cent. In other words, they are being pushed upwards into the 23p band rather than downwards to the new 10p band.

Exactly the same habit of stealth is apparent in the treatment of the married couples allowance. We shall vote and argue to retain that allowance because it is important that the institution of marriage remains recognised in the tax system. Not only have the Government abolished that allowance, but the children's tax credit, which the Chief Secretary just described, will not replace it until a year later. For a full year between the abolition of the married couples allowance and the introduction of a new and unsatisfactory alternative, the Government have the use of nearly £2 billion.

I turn now to the savings fiasco. The Government came into office committed to a radical reform of the welfare state. They had great plans to reform and reduce expenditure on social security. As I have already explained in reply to an intervention, they failed to do that. Conservative Members understand that reform is a question not only of cutting social security benefits, but of getting people into employment, ending their reliance on benefits and helping them to rely on their own savings and pension provision. So what are the Government doing? They are enmeshing businesses and savings in a web of regulations and extra taxes.

That is well illustrated by the Government's spiteful abolition of the most successful vehicles of all time—tax-exempt special savings accounts and personal equity plans. They were established over many years and have a proven record of success. They have genuinely established a savings habit among the British people. I do not know whether the Government's action is due to a lack of business experience on the Treasury Front Bench or to stupidity, but they are abolishing those tried and

tested savings vehicles and replacing them with a scheme that is wholly untested and not trusted. People do not trust the new individual savings accounts because the Government cannot be trusted on savings ever since they introduced their annual £5 billion raid on pension funds. No member of the public trusts the Government on pensions or savings.

Mr. Gardiner: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the take-up rate in ISAs suggests that the Government have maintained the public's trust and have, in particular, targeted the means to save at those on lower incomes, rather than those who, rightly, took up PEPs in the past, most of whom were on higher incomes?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No, the hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. I do not know whether he read *The Sunday Times* last weekend, but it reported that the take-up of ISAs is running at about 50 per cent. of the previous commitment to PEPs. In contrast to the Economic Secretary's complacent remarks at Question Time last week, the record on the take-up of, and savings through, ISAs is extremely disappointing. ISAs are less generous, more expensive and more complex than what they are replacing. The Prime Minister used to refer to an army of an extra 6 million savers that he was going to attract to this new savings product, but we do not hear any more about that from the Government; perhaps the Financial Secretary, who is to reply to the debate, can give us some updated figures. How many of those extra 6 million savers are applying to save through this new and untried savings vehicle?

Another awkward statistic for the Government, again from their own Red Book, is that the savings ratio has fallen from 11 per cent. in 1997 to 7 per cent. last year. The Government's effort to create a savings culture to replace a welfare culture has failed, and they have only themselves to blame.

Business taxation—

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me, but I have been fairly generous in giving way. I must make progress because several of my hon. Friends wish to contribute to this important debate.

Exactly the same propaganda machine has been busy in respect of business taxes. The Government came into office saying that they wanted to be friendly to businesses. Well, they have been friendly to a number of business men, but the general taxpaying business community has experienced nothing but an increase in the regulatory and tax burden on their enterprises. There are pages and pages of extra regulations and a massive extra complexity in the tax system.

The Government do not understand that a complex tax system, with multiple rates and complicated allowances, is itself a form of overhead that has to be borne by the productive sector of the economy. The Government have taken a tax system that we were simplifying and lowering, and made it more complex and raised it. I ask the House not to take my word for it, but to listen to what outside commentators and trade bodies are saying.

The president of the Confederation of British Industry, Sir Clive Thompson, said on Budget day:

"over the next four years as a result of Budgets which we've seen in the last two years, we are going to face something like a £20 billion increase in business taxation".

If the Government do not agree with that figure, perhaps they would like to say so now.

The problem does not lie only with the taxes inherited from the previous two budgets. The Association of British Chambers of Commerce, again in response to the Budget, said that its members faced an extra £3.2 billion increase in taxes over the next three years from the 1999 Budget alone. It concluded in a press release:

"business today is more heavily taxed, more heavily regulated than we were two years ago".

These are the very firms on which the Government are relying to produce the extra jobs for their employment schemes, a point made in an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce).

Unemployment in my constituency is going up because firms are simply not able to take on extra unemployed people because of the extra regulations and taxes heaped on them in one Budget after another. The Prime Minister goes to Milan and lectures other European Union leaders on the need to follow the United States model of low regulation and low taxes, yet in the Finance Bill he is converging not on that model but on the European Union model of more regulations and higher taxes. A very good example is what the Chancellor is doing with stamp duty, which is going up again. Contrary to what the Chancellor implied in his Budget speech, three quarters of the revenue is paid by businesses, not by individuals. Again, he is heaping extra burdens on the very sector of the economy that he hopes will provide extra employment.

The leaflet to which I have already referred is entirely silent on stamp duty, even though stamp duty raises more than three times as much as something that the leaflet does describe—a new research and development tax credit. That is proudly stated in that propagandist leaflet which has supposedly gone to 1.5 million households, even though it is not in the Finance Bill and will not come into effect until 2001. That is what the taxpayer is paying for—propaganda issued by the Treasury, which talks about measures not in the Finance Bill and covers up tax-raising measures that are in it.

I have dwelt at length on the fiddled figures. I shall end by mentioning indirect taxes. We shall debate the subject at greater length tomorrow, which is an Opposition day, but let me simply say that it is now beyond doubt that the Government are engaging in a deliberate and systematic raising of fuel duties, which not only does great damage to the rural motorist and those who have to use car transport, but is making an entire British industry uncompetitive in European terms.

Not only have the Government increased the escalator; they have had an extra Budget. Moreover, they have targeted the increases on the fuel of industry—diesel. They have made it nearly twice as expensive as it is for most of our competitors on the continent. Diesel duty is now exactly twice the European Union average.

All that is done under the guise of helping the environment. Will the Government explain how it helps the environment to have fuel smuggled across the border into Northern Ireland? How does it help the environment to have British lorries going to the continent to fill up

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

with cheap fuel? How does it help the environment to have foreign lorries coming into the country, using cheap fuel and taking jobs from British haulage companies? People in the haulage industry want an answer of the Government—how will putting them out of work help the environment?

I confirm that we, the Conservatives, now commit ourselves to ending the escalator and ending this fiasco of fuel duties.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley) *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall not give way. I am ending my remarks now. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if he has something original to say—which would be very unusual.

I wish to end on the following point. The fuel duties—

Jacqui Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The right hon. Gentleman has indicated that he is not going to give way.

Jacqui Smith: He promised me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not care what he promised the hon. Lady.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I ask the hon. Members for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) and for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) to forgive me. I usually give way generously, but I am aware that time is moving on.

What the Government are doing on fuel duties is symptomatic of their approach to taxation. Before the Budget, the Prime Minister said that he had

"no plans to increase taxation at all".

The Government have broken that promise repeatedly and deliberately and, by a mixture of stealth taxes, cooked statistics and sheer ignorance, they are putting at risk the golden economic legacy that we left them. Conservative Members will expose and oppose them. I ask all my right hon. and hon. Friends to join in that endeavour.

4.38 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): I welcome this Finance Bill, which enacts an excellent Budget that has provided help for most families and for business, and also useful tax cuts and public spending increases, all within a highly prudent fiscal framework.

The Opposition have quoted what various people think about the Budget. It might be worth quoting Mr. Samuel Brittan in the *Financial Times*. He says:

"Mr. Brown has removed two obsolete and harmful reliefs—that for mortgage interest and the so-called married couples allowance. He has improved the national insurance progression to increase incentives and lower the poverty tax. He has also undertaken desirable measures of redistribution towards families with children, where much of today's poverty tends to be found, and to provide top-up benefits for those who prefer to work for modest pay rather than try to claim the dole. He has moreover made a good start on his declared aim of integrating tax and social security into what might eventually be called a negative income tax."

That is the opinion of someone who is not a member of the Labour party. That is Samuel Brittan speaking about the Budget. We did not hear much of that from the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), the Opposition spokesman.

It is an excellent procedural device that the report of the Select Committee on the Treasury is discussed with the Second Reading of the Finance Bill. It is right that it should be, because we examine the economic background to the Budget and some of the issues that arise from it. I want to refer to both approaches. First, I think that the report reflects the fact that on our Select Committee there is broad support for the Government's economic and fiscal strategy. I shall quote from one of our expert witnesses, Mr. Gavyn Davies, who described quite well the dilemma facing the Government when they took office. He said:

"When the present Government took office two years ago, the economy was in the midst of an intense consumer led boom, and the key issue for the new Chancellor was whether he could control this boom without inducing a hard landing, with sharp increases in unemployment. Past history was not encouraging in this regard—without exception, all previous consumer booms of this type in the post-war period had been followed by a period of negative growth in real GDP, usually accompanied by new peaks in unemployment."

When we think about post-war history, there was the Maudling dash for growth, the Barber boom, the Lawson boom and the Clarke boomlet. I was a supporter of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who I thought was an excellent Chancellor, but at the end of his period in office he allowed the economy to get slightly out of control. I accept that the Labour party has shared in some of that history. I can remember standing unsuccessfully for election to this place in 1964 on the promise that we would manage to increase growth.

Basically, we now know that the aim of fiscal policy is to provide stability on the ground that, if we can secure that stability, growth will to some extent look after itself. I think that that is a sensible economic policy. It is one that has the support, by and large, of the Treasury Committee irrespective of party. If we study the figures, it seems that the Treasury forecast of 1 to 1.5 per cent. growth in 1999—that is predicting a soft landing rather than a hard one—is now quite a possibility, in a way that we would not have thought six months ago, for example. It seems that we shall have a successful slowdown without recession.

Of course, there are potential problems.

Mr. Tyrie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Radice: I shall finish this part of my speech.

There is the international economic situation, the United States and the level of the pound and what that might do for the British economy. We conclude in our report that the Treasury forecasts are not unrealistic.

Mr. Tyrie: The hon. Gentleman has partly covered the point that I wanted to make. However, does he not think that, if there is to be a soft landing, that will have far more to do with the fact that there has been a global slowdown—I think particularly of the collapse in Russia and the attendant

effects that that has had throughout the rest of the global economy—than with any change in economic policy by the Bank of England or in fiscal policy?

Mr. Radice: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. However, the Russian experience might have produced a hard landing or a recession rather than a soft landing. I think that the pick-up in consumer confidence that we are now seeing and the impact that that is beginning to have on output give us some hope at least that growth will be resumed. That is extremely good news. We did not hear anything of that from those on the Opposition Front Bench.

Two possible suggestions for this change were put to us on the Select Committee. There was, in a sense, an unholy alliance between Patrick Minford and Gavyn Davies, who both said that beneficial structural changes in the labour market had made it possible for the economy to be run at an unemployment rate substantially below that which had previously been consistent with stable inflation. If that is so, it is good news for the economy, as it means that the equilibrium or sustainable level of unemployment will be much lower than we previously thought. That background has enabled the Bank of England to implement the 225 basis points cut, which has helped the economy.

The second suggestion—here I come to the Chancellor and the Government's policy—is that so far the co-ordination in macro-policy between fiscal and monetary measures has been effective. We comment on that in our report, and it receives support from all quarters of our Committee.

A year ago, there was criticism of the Chancellor for failing to tighten fiscal policy sufficiently. However, it is now clear that, because of the tight control over public spending, and also because of tax increases, there has been a 3 per cent. tightening of gross domestic product since 1997. That is fairly substantial, and it is the Goldman Sachs definition, which is not challenged nowadays.

There is no doubt that, in the present Budget, despite some marginal fiscal stimulus, that tightening has continued. That has enabled the Monetary Policy Committee to cut faster and further than it otherwise would have been able to do. That vindicates the Chancellor's decision to give operational independence to the MPC to run interest rates. It has also shown that it is possible at the same time to co-ordinate monetary policy with fiscal policy. The Chancellor has tightened, and that has enabled the Bank to reduce interest rates. So far, that has worked successfully to produce not the recession that people feared six months ago, but, hopefully, a soft landing.

We comment on those matters, but we also examine some of the controversial issues about which we have been hearing this afternoon. What is the fiscal stance, and what about the tax burden? Of course, truth is many sided. We heard one aspect of the truth from the right hon. Member for Wells.

Let us consider the fiscal stimulus. The Chancellor says that his measures will produce a £6 billion fiscal stimulus over three years. That is true, but overall the Budget will be neutral or slightly tightened. If one considers the Budget in isolation, there will indeed be a £6 billion stimulus, but that does not reverse the fiscal tightening previously announced.

The Budget is basically neutral, as the MPC said in its inflation report. When the Treasury representative reported to the MPC about the Budget, the MPC stated that the overall position was reported to remain stable, which has allowed a further 1.25 per cent. interest rate cut since the Budget. The Budget is not unrealistic or irresponsible. It allows further cuts, which is good news for the economy.

Mr. Bercow: Given the inextricable link that exists between monetary policy and fiscal policy—a link that the hon. Gentleman highlighted—does he accept as a matter of plain logic that the arrogation of powers to the European central bank to run monetary policy will in due course inevitably have to be followed by a similar arrogation of powers to the central bank to run fiscal policy as well?

Mr. Radice: That is a debate for another day. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I shall be pleased to take part in it, but I will not be tempted down that path this afternoon.

I shall now deal with the tax burden issue. Mr. Andrew Dilnot, of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, told the Select Committee that

> "it is possible for anybody to . . . say, 'The changes announced in this budget will cut the tax burden' . . . while it is also a true statement to say that, as a result of all the budgets of this Parliament, taxes will be going up in April."

Our conclusion, with which neither of the two Front Benches may entirely agree, was that, both on the basis of including rebates and scoring them as expenditure and on the basis of excluding rebates scored in that way, taxes are cut in this Budget. There is no doubt about that: I have done the sums, and looked at the proposition in all possible ways.

On the other hand, if we also take account of increases—mainly in company taxation—that were announced in previous Budgets and will come into effect, we see that the tax burden will increase. I do not think that that is anything to be ashamed of, however, because there has been a reduction in tax on people, and some increase in tax on companies, during the period concerned. That is a sensible policy: it has allowed tax rates to be reduced, and has allowed us to control the Government's fiscal policies.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Surely, at the beginning of a tax year, people want to know whether they will pay more tax than they did in the previous year, rather than when the Government announced that they would pay the increased taxes.

Mr. Radice: As a result of this Budget, most individuals will pay lower taxes. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that. It is not just coming out of my head; it is what we were told when we took evidence. That is the point of Select Committees: experts come and tell them things.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I hesitate to intervene, but I must correct what the hon. Gentleman has said about the evidence from the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Mr. Dilnot specifically said that, although it appears that families are

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

better off, the taxes raised by increases in corporation tax and the removal of tax credits are, in effect, eventually borne by individuals. He said that

"we can be certain it is people who will pay them."

The distinction between company taxation and the taxation of individuals is, to that extent, rather artificial.

Hon. Members: What is the reference?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We cannot have sedentary exchanges. The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) gave way to an intervention; he must now deal with it.

Mr. Radice: The right hon. Member for Wells quoted from our report without giving us any reference.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I quoted from Mr. Dilnot's response to a Conservative questioner. On page 4 of the minutes of evidence, he says that it is rather artificial to suppose that company taxes are borne by companies. He makes the point—a point that is familiar to tax specialists—that all taxes are eventually borne by the public and by individuals.

Mr. Radice: That is a possibility, but it does not apply in the short term, and it may not even apply in the medium term.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire) *rose—*

Mr. Radice: No, I will not give way for the moment. I want to make some progress.

Sir Michael Spicer *rose—*

Mr. Radice: Oh, all right.

Sir Michael Spicer: The hon. Gentleman is giving a fair interpretation, certainly of what the Select Committee has said and of what the facts are, but why are his own Front Benchers so coy about the net effect of all these taxes in respect of the percentage of gross domestic product if the position is exactly as he describes?

Mr. Radice: My Front Benchers have been making the point that this Budget reduces taxes. That point has been denied by Opposition Front Benchers.

Sir Michael Spicer: The Chancellor, in evidence, refused to accept the precise point that I am now raising. He constantly refused to accept that taxes were going up over a period in respect of the percentage of GDP, even if the various Budgets were compounded. Why does the Chancellor think, in his own mind, that that is the case?

Mr. Radice: The Chancellor must answer for himself. I am saying that the Government have been trying to make it clear this afternoon that taxes will decline as a result of this Budget; they will be lower than they otherwise would have been. I am not sure that that point is accepted by Conservative Front Benchers, but they must consider that fact—it is the real issue.

The tax burden depends on which definition people accept. We have looked at different ways of calculating the tax burden as a percentage of GDP. The excellent table 2, which is on page xi of the Treasury Committee report, shows that, in all three aspects, there is a reduction in the tax burden related to GDP as a result of this Budget. It goes up in latter years. It is only fair to say that, in respect of the national accounts definition of the tax burden, receipts rise year by year—including this year.

Jacqui Smith: When considering the tax burden, would it also be fair to say that figures in the 1999 Red Book are lower than those in last year's Red Book and lower than those in the last Conservative Budget?

Mr. Radice: Both those points are correct and, in the light of our report, it is quite absurd to accuse the Government of fiddling the figures. That is a stupid charge to make against them. It is also absurd to talk about smoke and mirrors—everything is in the Red Book, if hon. Members trouble to read it.

I accept that, in some instances, the Red Book is not as clear as it might be and takes some reading. Therefore, our report contains some presentational suggestions, which I hope the Treasury will look at. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) smiles, but some of those suggestions would have been applicable when he was in government. Our experience over a number of years prompted me, as Chairman of the Committee, to draft those suggestions. They were accepted by the Committee.

Mr. Jack: I smiled because I have read those three paragraphs in the conclusion. I was quite amused by the fact that it took this Budget to provoke the hon. Gentleman and his Committee to administer a real rap across the knuckles to the Treasury for having gone so far in making it so difficult to find out some of the detail.

Mr. Radice: It was very much the same when the right hon. Gentleman's party was in power, so he cannot come up with that kind of line. He knows that perfectly well.

There is no table setting out the basis on which the Budget changes are estimated. They are difficult to work out—one has to be a considerable scholar to do so—and they are not easily accessible. The figure in question is the £18 billion from which the Government were able to derive tax cuts and increase spending.

As our report says:

"We . . . asked for a note on how the figure could be derived. This note explains that the £18 billion figure is reached by subtracting from the expenditure changes listed in table B13 the figures in lines 3, 6, 15, 16 and 19 to 27 of table 1.11, which are the budget measures affecting spending as distinct from taxation."

I can see that, but it is rather a difficult way for the ordinary individual to work out what is happening. We suggest that, next time, the Government give a clearer table so that we can understand the figures better.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, because he has given me the opportunity to be a total Government loyalist.

Mr. Radice: A sycophant to the end.

Mr. Cousins: Indeed.

Does my hon. Friend accept the fact that one does not have to explore the highways and byways of accounting conventions to understand that for workers earning half to three quarters of the average income—those are the workers about whom we, as Members of Parliament from the north-east of England, are concerned—the Budget represents a substantial reduction in net direct income tax and net national insurance contributions, as well as, for those who have children, a considerable, almost staggering, increase in support through family credit and working families tax credit?

Mr. Radice: I accept that. Indeed, I started my speech by making some very favourable remarks about the Budget, and I quoted Samuel Brittan, who also made favourable remarks.

I shall finish by offering the Government some more of the Select Committee's suggestions. We would like the tables illustrating the financial effects of successive Budgets to show them not only separately, but combined. That would make it easier to see what was going on.

We would also like to be able to divide taxation and those benefits that are scored as expenditure. Again, that would make it easier to work out what was going on. There should also be a table in the Red Book on distribution, so that we could see the good things that the Budget has done. We should not have to rely on parliamentary questions.

I am in favour of the Budget leaflet suggested by the Chancellor, and I think that it should be delivered to every household—but there should be an independent element. The National Audit Office, for example, or the Institute for Fiscal Studies could look at it so that there could be an agreed view. As I have been trying to show, truth is many sided, but, if such an exercise in providing broad public information is to be undertaken, it is important that it should not be seen as a Government propaganda exercise. In the long term, that could undermine its value. A Government who have made as many innovations in open government as the present Administration should have no difficulty in responding to what I believe are our constructive and helpful suggestions.

The Treasury Committee does not exist to be the Chancellor's cheer leader. If we have suggestions or criticisms, we shall make them. However, we do not exist to provide opposition, either—although, having heard the Opposition spokesman today, I realise why proper opposition is needed.

We have made it clear that we support the Government's overall economic strategy, because we think it highly sensible. We did not hear a word about that from the Opposition. The real role of the Treasury Committee is to ensure that people who come before us, including the Chancellor—and, indeed, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to whose appearance before us we very much look forward, and my hon. Friend the Paymaster General—are accountable. That is what the Committee is there for. That is why we ask them questions.

We want to be able to elucidate the issues and problems, try to explain them, make what we hope are helpful and constructive proposals and suggestions, and then report them to the House and to the Government. That is what we have been trying to do with the Budget.

5.5 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice). The Treasury Committee produced an excellent report. It will be interesting to see the Government's reply to the Committee's specific recommendations. I hope that they will reply not only to the letter, but to the spirit of the report. They may say, "Yes, we might deal with the problems raised," and then find other ways of obscuring the presentation. If we are to have intelligent debate in the House and across the country to inform people, we need a more genuine statement of what Budgets are doing and what the Government intend them to do, and some independent assessment of what is happening.

The Select Committee did not mention the fact that a parliamentary answer on the impact of the Budget on the taxation of the average family is no longer provided. That was the practice for 22 years and was discontinued by the Chancellor after his first Budget. That makes it much more difficult to compare the impact of past, present and future Budgets. No doubt that was the reason for the change. There is, therefore, some justification for the suspicion that the Government do not want, contrary to the spirit of the report, to present an open and clear picture that can be assessed properly and provides a comparison with the past. The Select Committee has done a good job, and is pointing in the direction in which we should go.

Mr. Jack: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's point about the parliamentary answer, which has traditionally been the practice since 1981, when the now Secretary of State for the Home Department, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), first tabled such a question. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the Government have seemed reluctant to tell the truth about the impact on different households of their tax proposals. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in their latest attempt to answer such parliamentary questions, the Government are praying in aid the difficulties of measuring the impact of indirect taxes—hence the fact that they will not come clean on that aspect?

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful for that intervention, not least because it leads me to the increasing complexity of the tax system that the Chancellor has introduced. Before I refer to that, I shall briefly give the overall economic background to the Finance Bill.

I welcome the fact that we hope to secure a soft landing across the economy. Overall, we will not sink into negative growth and we may start to see a recovery. That is to be welcomed: it is what we hoped the strategy would achieve. Our concern was that the Government took risks early on that may have heightened the risk of moving into recession. The Chancellor's first Budget did not tackle the apparent consumer boom through fiscal policy, so the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England was

[Mr. Bruce]

left with no option but to increase interest rates sharply. That caused borrowers considerable difficulties, and it still remains a serious problem for our divided economy. If the overall situation is looking reasonably encouraging, the situation for manufacturers and exporters is getting worse. We are now predicting a dip into recession.

On today's exchange rates, the pound has almost hit the DM3 level. We have a strong pound and interest rates running at almost double the European rate. All the indications are that that gap is not only likely to be retained in the short to medium term, but could even widen in the not-too-distant future. If recovery starts to show itself strongly in the United Kingdom against a background of fairly flat growth in the European economy, by the middle of the year the Monetary Policy Committee may be putting up interest rates when the European Central Bank is continuing to reduce them. That will inevitably increase the upward pressure on the pound. It remains a concern for us that the Government do not seem to have a strategy for dealing with that problem. We are not suggesting that it is easy for the Government to find a solution.

Ministers are keen to boast about the economic position, with some justification. We predicted that long-term interest rates would come down sharply if the Bank of England was made independent. That was part of our election strategy, and because the Government adopted that policy that is exactly what has happened. The Government, perfectly reasonably I suppose, are claiming the credit.

That being the case, should we not produce policies to encourage more long-term borrowing that can import those lower, long-term interest rates to the short term. *[Interruption.]* That is a serious point, although the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) is laughing at it. He should recognise that it would be a help in narrowing the interest rate divide between the UK and Europe and taking some of the pressure off the pound.

It is a matter of some regret to us that the Government have not sought to introduce in the Finance Bill some strategy and incentive to make that switch. One hopes, even without incentives from the Government, that institutions, and possibly individuals, will move towards more long-term borrowing. The problem with that—and it must be addressed by the Treasury—is that most individuals are at the mercy of what the financial institutions are prepared to offer. Many of them are not prepared to offer long-term fixed interest rates that give the full benefit of those long-term interest rates. The Treasury could have done more to make that more likely to happen.

We hope that the economy will show an ability to recover, although we expect more job losses and more closures in the manufacturing sector, if the situation continues—as seems likely. Although our reasoned amendment has not been selected and I do not wish to trespass beyond the rules of order, the House will understand that it summarises our main concerns about the Bill and why we will vote against it. One of our concerns is that the Chancellor has made the tax system much more complicated than necessary. It is worth recording that Nigel Lawson, who was a reforming Chancellor, reduced the number of personal taxes to four. When the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was Chancellor, he raised that to eight. Under the present Chancellor, the number has peaked at 54, including the capital gains tax, which forms a significant part of it.

I notice that the Chancellor, in an exchange in the Select Committee on the Treasury with my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), suggested that the capital gains taper was a virtue that we should support. However, we do not regard that reform as progressive. It hits small businesses especially, for which capital gains is an integral part of their business, and allows a small number of very fat cats to get away with massive tax breaks—something that one would not have expected of a Labour Chancellor. It is regrettable that he has pursued it. The Chancellor has made the system much more complicated. It is a wonderful Budget for tax accountants; it is not a good Budget for small businesses and individuals trying to cope with self-assessment and calculating their tax liability.

The debate about the tax burden has become like the mediaeval argument about the number of angels dancing on the head of a pin. It has been generally accepted that the tax burden went up under the Tories by a marginal amount and is probably going up by a modest amount under the present Government. Perhaps it would be much better for the debate if everybody accepted that and started to talk about the merits of the particular taxes and what burden might be acceptable in relation to what we want to do with the economy and with the resources that are generated.

Mr. Tyrie: In countries where the tax burden has risen very fast—for example, in continental Europe—growth performance has been most desultory. In countries where the tax burden has been kept down, long-term economic growth has been outstanding. The United States is the best example and, as I mentioned in an earlier intervention, the United Kingdom is another example. Growth performance has been remarkable, and part of the reason is that the tax burden has been kept down.

Mr. Bruce: It is not worth allowing the hon. Gentleman to intervene for such a predictable comment. It is not as simple as that. I do not suggest that the level of the tax burden does not matter or is not a legitimate matter for debate. It is, and we have taken part in that debate. We have a relatively low tax burden, but we also have seriously underfunded public services. There is a genuine debate about where the balance should rightly be struck. Although France and Germany are currently experiencing difficulties—we should be concerned about that, because they are our trading partners—over 30 and 40 years they have sustained higher long-term growth and a higher tax burden. It may not be unconnected to note that they used the yield on their economies to invest in quality public services, which are substantially superior to our own.

I am not prejudging what is a matter for legitimate debate. However, it would be helpful if we could agree about the basic situation without spending too much time on academic theorising as to the niceties of exact definition—a direction in which I fear that the argument has strayed.

We regret the Budget's impact on the tax system's complexity, and we have articulated our concerns about the 10p tax rate. We do not dissent from the basic

argument that that tax, and the overall tax changes related to national insurance, will help to reduce the tax burden on people on lower incomes. Our argument is about whether that is the most efficient way to help those people and whether more could be achieved through a better targeted and more accurately costed proposal, such as the one that we have made. These are legitimate points for debate and genuine discussion.

Our Budget proposals involve an element that the Government do not appear to be prepared to acknowledge—the 50 per cent. tax rate on earnings above £100,000 a year. Given the other allowances that the Government have abolished, that 50p rate could have been used to raise the personal allowance to £5,600. The result would be that 2.5 million people could be taken out of taxation altogether, and the take-home pay of full-time workers on low wages would be boosted significantly.

We think that Labour Members should regard that as desirable, and we ask them to accept that there is a genuine difference between our parties on how the reforms should be targeted to benefit the groups of people that we all want to help. Our proposal is more radical and far-reaching than anything in the Bill.

Although the Chief Secretary seemed deliberately to fail to grasp the implication of my earlier intervention, perhaps Labour Members will be able to connect with my argument if I couch it in terms of the minimum wage. If it is considered that a minimum wage is necessary and that people are not to be expected to work for less, is it not reasonable to aspire to put that wage out of the tax bracket altogether? It is ridiculous that people in full-time work earning the minimum wage should pay tax and also qualify for housing benefit and other benefits.

The sooner the minimum wage is taken out of the tax bracket, the better. In his Budget speech, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that that was an aspiration, but we consider that he is going more slowly than he needs to with that reform.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Barbara Roche): Will the hon. Gentleman explain how what he has said is compatible with his party's opposition in Committee to the national minimum wage? Liberal Democrat Members at that time argued for a regional minimum wage.

Mr. Bruce: It is perfectly compatible. We share with the Government a recognition of the need to tackle the problem of low wages, but our approach in the Committee considering what became the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 was different. The Government wanted a national minimum wage, but we considered that significant regional variations could and should have been taken into account. Interestingly, many of us took the view that the old wages councils dealt with that problem, as they were able to take account of different industries and different regional factors.

We are worried that the national minimum wage is too blunt an instrument, but we agree with the Government that there is a need to reduce the tax burden on people on low incomes, and that very low incomes should be boosted to more acceptable levels. We believe that the aspiration should be to put people on the national minimum wage outside the tax bracket altogether. That is what the Chancellor says he is aiming for, but, unless he finds a more radical approach, he will take two or three Parliaments to achieve it. If he is looking for a radical approach, he should talk to us: we are still a radical party, not frightened to propose radical policies.

The introduction of the 10p tax rate seems to have trapped the Chancellor in another of the anomalies that arise whenever changes to the tax system are introduced. We now have the absurd situation where people who earn a lowish wage will benefit from the reduction from 20p to 10p on £1,500 of their income. The 10p tax rate is a worthwhile reduction that justifies the claims being made. However, if that same income is derived from the savings of, for example, a pensioner with a small nest egg, it qualifies for a 23 per cent. tax rate: The Chancellor does not accept that, for people on low incomes, it makes no difference whether income is obtained by people of working age going out to earn it or by people who have made some provision for a retirement nest egg and depend on it but do not get the same benefit. The cost to the Treasury of extending the 10p rate to savings for the first £1,500 would be about £85 million. When I asked the Chancellor about that at Treasury questions, I was surprised that he was so contemptuous of the argument. He accused me of being irresponsible with Exchequer funds. Chancellors lose billions easily, so it is reasonable to ask the Treasury to consider £85 million for a reform with a particular purpose.

There are two reasons why Treasury Ministers should consider my proposal. First, last year's Budget abolished the tax refund to non-taxpaying dividend holders or recipients. The then Paymaster General told my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and an all-party delegation that he intended to seek a solution. His promise disappeared with his demise. The problem with Ministers is that they do not pass on their promises to their successors. People are still angry about what the Government did and promised to put right. My proposal would provide some recognition that the Government understand that pensioners with small savings deserve consideration.

Secondly, financial institutions say that it is difficult to pass on the full benefit of the latest interest rate cut to borrowers because of their concern about the lower rate for savers. Many of them have not passed it on. If the Government were to introduce this tax change, it would benefit savers by ensuring that they did not pay tax on such earnings and make it easier for financial institutions to pass on the benefit of lower interest rates to borrowers. It would help both parties. It is a small change of real benefit to many people.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the unpartisan way in which he makes his remarks. He mentioned the fiscal regime and how it meshes with monetary policy. He alluded to a key plank of the Government's fiscal policy, the abolition of advance corporation tax and the fiscal tightening, which his party called for after the general election, of £5.3 billion. However, his party rejected that fiscal tightening. The new deal money from the windfall tax was rejected by his party. He must explain how he would produce the effects of such a fiscal tightening.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman got confused between the windfall tax and the ACT changes. They add up to £10 billion, which is a substantial tax change. We said

[Mr. Bruce]

clearly that a fiscal tightening was needed, but it should have been targeted to take the heat out of inflationary pressure by aiming not at businesses but consumers. The Chancellor chose not to do that. I do not intend to unravel what might have been done two years ago, because the opportunity has been lost. However, he will know, as the House will know, that the Liberal Democrats consistently produce a fully costed manifesto and annual alternative Budgets that explain exactly what different measures we would introduce and where we would derive the income from. We have been complimented on them by external bodies. The Institute for Fiscal Studies said at the election that they were a reasonable presentation of our priorities and how they would be paid for. We are proud of that, and we intend to continue that process.

Our motion contains a reference to the duty on sparkling cider, which we voted against after the Budget statement. The sparkling cider industry is small. It involves relatively small numbers of people, but it is a long-established home industry in the west country of England. It is now subjected to a 400 per cent. tax increase in a single year. It seems to us unreasonable that small businesses should be expected to absorb such an increase as a result of some irrelevant complaints about Italian wine manufacturers. How on earth anyone could presume that people cannot tell the difference between Lambrusco and Somerset cider, I really do not know. It is absurd that we should force people out of business. The cider manufacturers are in no doubt that the consequence of the tax change will be an end to the industry. Their businesses will cease, the income will be lost and people will be put out of work. It is an unjustified change.

A more important measure in the Budget was the change in the fuel tax, which has already been mentioned in today's debate. The Liberal Democrats accept the basic principle of green taxation, or using taxation to encourage environmentally beneficial behaviour. However, certain conditions need to be attached to such taxation. It should not be used as a back-door way of increasing revenue. It should be used specifically to achieve behavioural changes. The revenue should be used clearly to offset taxes in other areas.

The Government have simply banged up the tax on petrol and diesel, with no corresponding offset apart from a minor one for small cars, and have put the revenue straight into the general exchequer. There is very little difference between that and the Conservatives' putting 5 per cent. on domestic fuel and, after the row, claiming that it was an environmental tax and introducing a whole load of benefits for those affected. They had to give half the revenue back to try to allay the outrage that was engendered. The Labour Government will not be able to continue the policy unless they think it through much more carefully.

The Liberal Democrats' proposal on petrol was to abolish vehicle excise duty on fuel-efficient cars below 1600 cc. That would have given people the clear message, "If you do not want to pay the extra tax on petrol, switch to a smaller car and you will not pay vehicle excise duty." People would have known that, if they drove a gas-guzzler, they would pay, but, if they drove a fuel-efficient car, they would get money back. They would know what to do and make their behavioural switch.

Many haulage contractors have no such viable alternative, partly because the Government have not thought through what alternatives people are supposed to use. I should be interested to hear the Government's answer to those in the industry who say that switching to low-emission, fuel-efficient trucks and benefiting from the lower vehicle excise duty will not offset the cost of the escalator. I am assured by haulage contractors in my constituency that, even if the Government paid the entire cost of converting vehicles and abolished vehicle excise duty, the contractors would still be in an uncompetitive situation.

In anticipation of the Minister's reply about corporation tax rates and the whole package, I tell him that most haulage companies say that, to pay tax, a company first has to make a profit. Two major haulage companies in my constituency have gone into liquidation in the past three months and most others say that they are shedding labour by between 20 and 50 per cent. I have heard from other companies that they will relocate part of their business nearer their markets in the south of England. Ministers should be aware that the manager of one company in my constituency pointed from his office window to a yard where there were 30 articulated vehicles and told me that no duty had been paid to the Exchequer of the United Kingdom for any of those trucks in rural Aberdeenshire, because all of them contained diesel that had been bought in continental Europe. He also told me that, as he had good contacts elsewhere, he could cut his duty costs by a further 20 per cent. simply by contracting Irish haulage companies. However, he was not prepared to do that because he wanted to support his local contractors. Those are real problems, facing real companies, and the Government must acknowledge that they need to think those matters through more than they have done so far.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am a little wary because I see that the Ministers sitting on the Treasury Bench are taking notes of the Liberal Democrat suggestions. Does the hon. Gentleman remember that, before the Conservative Government introduced VAT on domestic fuel, a Liberal Democrat policy document called for a carbon tax on domestic fuel? Indeed, the Liberal Democrat candidate who fought me at the general election said that the very minimum that should be done was to put VAT on domestic fuel. Surely, if the Government were to follow that policy, they would be criticised for doing what the Liberal Democrats had suggested.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: It has often been said that Liberal Democrats provide policy initiatives for the Tories. Perhaps that was one that the Tories should not have taken up. The hon. Gentleman cannot cite the words of one candidate as the official policy. The truth is that our policy—*[Interruption.]* It has never been Liberal Democrat policy to put VAT on domestic fuel; it has been our policy to have a carbon tax and it remains our view that there should be pollution taxes. We would use the yield from such taxes to raise the threshold at which people start paying tax, so that we can remove people on low incomes from tax altogether. One can make a connection between green taxes and helping people on low incomes to have more take-home pay and life-style choices—including choices that do not pollute the environment.

However, we must be realistic as to the choices that people can make; it is clear that the impact of the escalator on the haulage industry does not allow that industry the necessary latitude. The Government must acknowledge, or explain in ways that are acceptable to the industry, which choices they believe can realistically be made. I assure the House that there is no way other than trucks to transport timber from the depths of the forests of the highlands and the north-east of Scotland. It is a joke for a Minister at the Scottish Office to produce a brochure showing timber being drawn by trains, when some of those forests are 100 miles from the nearest railhead. It is absurd to suggest that that is a viable solution.

The Liberal Democrats want the Government to reconsider those particular concerns about the Budget. I hope that it is accepted that many of them have been expressed in a constructive way, because we share some common objectives, even though we disagree about the means to achieve them and the speed at which they might be achieved.

The one matter on which we shall not have the opportunity to vote was referred to in the last words of the Chancellor's speech: his announcement of his intention to cut the standard rate of income tax by a penny in his next Budget—presumably, therefore, in the next Finance Bill. What astonishes Liberal Democrat Members is why, if the Government can find money to cut the standard rate of income tax, they cannot find enough money for the investment required to deal with the problems of health and education. That certainly astonishes many people throughout the country who have spoken to me since the Budget. I know what the Government's reply is: "We are finding £40 billion; it will all be sorted." However, Ministers fail to grasp the fact that damage was done, not only by the Conservative Government's squeeze, but by the continuation of that squeeze—with intensification—during the first two years of the Labour Government. There is a long way to go before even the Government's own objectives of reduced class sizes will be achieved.

The other day, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) very effectively challenged the Deputy Prime Minister. We are told that the Government's priority is to cut class sizes for the first three years of primary education, but that is done at the cost of increasing class sizes for the remaining years of primary and secondary education. Achieving that priority will require more resources than the Government have identified. The fact is that the cost of reducing class sizes has exploded, to about six times the Government's estimate, and that is only for the first three years of primary education.

In the health service, there is a major problem with recruitment and retention of nurses and doctors. We simply cannot go on plundering the third world for its scarce trained nurses and doctors; we have to redeploy and train our own staff. Although it takes several years to train such staff, Ministers should remember that there are many nurses and quite a few doctors who are not working in the national health service, and some who are not working in the health sector at all—because staff calculations do not have built into them the ability to produce flexible rotas that take account of people's real circumstances, or provide rates of pay for part-time work that, once transport and split-shift problems have been taken into account, are adequate to cover child care and other expenses. Such sorts of issues need to be addressed, but they are not being addressed; solving them will require resources that the Government have not even begun to think about.

In every Minister's speech, we hear of the Government's determination to end boom and bust in the economy, but I want to know when they are going to end boom and bust in the public sector and let that sector have clear access to a long-term climate in which real investment and real redress of their problems can be costed through. The Budget gives an indication of changed priorities—a mind change within the Government. The Government tell us that they have sorted out the problems in health and education, even though not a single person in this country believes that. In the second half of this Parliament, the Government are going to move to an agenda of fighting the next general election on the basis of cutting taxes, before they have delivered material improvements in health and education. Following that course will cost the Labour party dear.

In addition, the Government have created an increasingly complicated tax system that is extremely difficult for individuals and businesses to understand. That will provide rich pickings for tax accountants, but cause real difficulties to most individuals and companies. In the next reshuffle, the Prime Minister might want to look for a new Chancellor, one who can sort out the complicated mess into which the current, supposedly reforming, Chancellor has got us. We want a Chancellor who will simplify and reform, not one who will make the system infinitely more complicated.

5.37 pm

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): I am pleased to be able to speak in the debate and to welcome the Finance Bill. I am glad that, by putting families and pensioners at the heart of the Bill, the Government have gone a long way toward helping those who suffered the most during the 18 years of Tory rule. For that reason, I shall focus on the Bill's provisions relating to pensioners and families.

In my constituency, we are extremely lucky to have active and public-minded pensioners. There are several pensioner groups and organisations which not only help pensioners with their individual needs but take a close interest in issues that affect the wider community, such as the problem of drug taking among young people or environmental matters. The elderly play a central role in the life of the local community in Govan.

However, those same people, who worked hard all their lives and made a valuable contribution to society, have found that their needs and concerns have been ignored by the state to such an extent that they have become one of the most disadvantaged groups in our society. It was time that that was put right, so I am glad that the raft of measures in the Bill that are directed at the elderly will help to reward pensioners for the contribution that they have made, and continue to make, to our society. Increasing personal allowances above inflation, linking rises in the minimum income guarantee to earnings and retaining the married couples allowance for pensioners will substantially improve the quality of life for the poorest pensioners.

I should like to mention particularly the decision to increase winter fuel payments fivefold from £20 to £100. Combined with the reduction in VAT on fuel, that move

[Mr. Mohammad Sarwar]

has been welcomed by pensioners in Scotland, where the colder climate makes the increase all the more important for the elderly. The decision contrasts with the increases in VAT on fuel introduced by the Conservatives in government and demonstrates the importance that this Government attach to improving the lives of pensioners. The measures provide an additional £3 billion for the elderly, which will help to assist some of the poorest members of society and will ensure that the elderly are not left behind as Britain continues to prosper under this Government.

At present, 700,000 pensioners do not claim income support and will, unfortunately, lose out on the increases in the minimum income guarantee. I hope that the Government will introduce initiatives to encourage such pensioners to apply for the benefits to which they are entitled. Perhaps the Government could launch a public information campaign targeted at such pensioners. That would ensure that all pensioners who need help are able to benefit from the measures in the Bill.

Equally importantly, this is a Bill for families and for work. The welfare system that we inherited from the previous Government has failed to bridge the gap between benefit and work. In fact, the benefit and tax systems have constructed increasing barriers for people on benefit who are desperate to return to the workplace and have thus contributed perversely to widening inequality and increasing poverty. That has served to undermine families, resulting in family breakdown and an increasing number of families living in poverty and on low pay. The system needs drastic changes, and I am glad that the Bill delivers them.

The new tax credit for children, set out in clause 27, is a radical and innovative policy which is designed to meet that challenge. The married couples allowance was given at a flat rate to all married people, regardless of income and irrespective of whether they had children. It was very ineffective at directing help where it was needed most. By contrast, the new children's tax credit will direct support to families and people with responsibility for children. As it will not go to those on high incomes, the measure will ensure that help is channelled to those who are most in need.

Five million families will benefit from that bold measure. Together with the working families tax credit and the increase in child benefit, the children's tax credit will go a long way towards easing conditions for families with children—particularly the poorest families. Combined with the measures that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced earlier, the reform will serve to lift 700,000 children out of poverty.

In addition to tackling child poverty and low pay, the changes will help to break down the barriers between benefit and employment. By making work pay, they will make the transition from benefit to work much smoother and easier. The proposal to reduce national insurance payments for low earners and the working families tax credit will assist children whose parents are out of work or receive means-tested benefits by making work more financially attractive through enabling those who depend on benefit to make the difficult transition to employment without being impoverished in the process.

The far-reaching changes that have occurred in the economy, particularly in the labour market, and the impact that they have had on other areas—most notably the welfare state—make the need for an interrelated and integrated approach to welfare policy even more urgent. However, the fragmented benefits and tax system that we inherited from the Tories has served to increase unemployment, the social security budget, inequality and poverty.

The approach embodied in the measures in the Bill and the working families tax credit takes account of the close, complex connections involving benefits, families and employment and how they impact on each other. By introducing measures that will increase the income of poorer families and at the same time enable people to make the difficult transition to work and to stay in work, the Bill and the Chancellor's other reforms mark an important step forward in meeting the challenges presented by the radically different economic environment that we face today.

I hope that the Bill will be followed by further measures to bridge the gap between welfare and work. The Red Book states that the Government are examining long-term proposals to integrate the new children's tax credit with the child allowances that are paid to unemployed families through income support and to in-work families through the working families tax credit. I hope that the Government will be able to give serious consideration to such changes and build on the Bill's measures to create a single, fully integrated system of tax and benefits, making entry into the labour market for those on benefits much easier.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his Treasury team on a Bill that contains a plethora of innovative measures. It combines fairness and justice with a long-term strategic vision. I am glad that, although nothing is smooth in life, there has been no intervention on my speech, for which I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House. I commend the Bill to the House.

5.47 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): An intervention on the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) could have been arranged, but he had obviously given great care and attention to his remarks, and I wanted to hear him out. Had I intervened on him, I would have pointed out that the very pensioners to whom he referred at the beginning of his speech, whom he sought to help, have suffered as a result of, for example, the Government's removal of the payable tax credit. Some of the poorest pensioners in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, who perhaps receive a small income from shares bequeathed to them by earlier generations, are now paying more tax as a result of the proposals in the Government's previous Budget, which he so fulsomely supported.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to the removal of 700,000 children from poverty. We all desire an end to poverty conditions, but I recently tabled a question to the Prime Minister to find out his exact definition of child poverty. When I discovered that the definition was rooted in an analysis of what were called "households below average income", I suddenly realised that poverty was a moving target. Households with an income below average will find that their income increases over time, as overall incomes increase, so we may find that those 700,000

children remain within the same category for ever and a day. That is a false target. The hon. Member for Govan was lucky that I did not interrupt him on that point.

The debate is the start of the long process of considering the Finance Bill, which is shorter than those that we have been used to. The last Finance Bill that I had the pleasure of taking through the House was nearly twice as long as this one. However, the fact that there are fewer clauses does not mean that there are not plenty of proposals to question and criticise. That will be my purpose during my remarks.

On the day of the Budget, *The Sun* exclaimed in triumph, "Everyone a winner!" I am afraid that *The Sun* got it wrong because, like everybody else, it was seduced by the Chancellor's presentation on the day and did not examine the detail. Over time, people who have a house and no children will lose out because of the Budget. Honourable couples—married couples—who look after an aged relative for example, will lose out as a result of this Budget. Single people will also lose out. Right hon. and hon. Members have already mentioned those in industry and the road haulage industry who will lose out. Something like 4 million people will lose out as a result of the Budget, and I hope that in the course of the debate we shall tease out who the losers will be.

In his usual perceptive and carefully argued way, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) put his finger on a very important point. This is a fiddly little Budget. It is a gift to accountants—it has so many intricate details that one really will need an expert to sort it out. I shall later show how in the arcane matter of, for example, schedule 3, which relates to clause 27, the Treasury draftsmen have done their worst and opened up a minefield. I hope that the Financial Secretary, who no doubt has penetrated schedule 3, will be able to answer the questions that I shall put to her.

The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury, rather pulled me up when I smiled on hearing his Committee's findings on the Budget, but I was much taken by its conclusions on presentation. Given our involvement with Treasury matters, I suppose that we know something about presentation, and the hon. Gentleman was right to point the finger at me and say that I perhaps did some of that too. We all sometimes have to handle difficult messages, but this Budget took smoke and mirrors to the level of a new art form. I can think of some of the people who might have assisted in this, and they have clearly lost none of their skills in the transfer to the new Government.

I was particularly interested in the Select Committee's proposal for an element of independent audit, involving the National Audit Office and the Institute for Fiscal Studies. There is merit in that. It is important that people understand what the Budget is about. The voyage of exploration that we all have to undertake, looking at the detail of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", is difficult. The Chancellor wanted to triumph on the day, and I am sure that he does not want his triumph taken away later, but he lays himself open to criticism.

I also welcome the Select Committee's finding that the Government should not wait for parliamentary questions to be tabled before reporting on the distributional effects of the Budget. The hon. Member for Gordon touched on that very point. I should like the Financial Secretary and the Economic Secretary to answer fully the question that has recently been tabled and follows the same format as that asked by the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in 1981. Will they stop falling back on the excuse that it is difficult to estimate the impact of indirect taxation in terms of the overall impact of tax changes on many different levels of income? However difficult that task might be, the Treasury should at least be consistent. When the Government were in opposition, they were happy to have that information and to use it against the then Government—I have to say that they used it effectively. In this age of open government, the least that the Financial Secretary can do is to ensure that, when that question is retabled, it is properly answered. We need that transparency.

Several people have implied that the Bill's overall effect on the tax burden involves a rather arcane, ethereal debate with which we should not soil our hands. I shall spend a few moments considering that argument and refreshing our memory as to why it is important that we do not lose sight of such important points.

The measures that will determine the overall tax burden of the next three financial years combine measures introduced in the 1998 Budget with those introduced in 1999 Budget. We should not forget the interaction between the two. One of the elements of the lack of transparency displayed in the Budget is the Chancellor's unwillingness to relate that which is already in train to that which is coming. The Chancellor owed it to the House to present a more coherent picture by putting the two together. I shall make up for that deficiency.

Let me remind the House of one or two measures which have already been agreed and are coming. Mention has been made of the abolition of advance corporation tax. I shall touch on two aspects of it which I am sad that the Bill does not seek to address. The Bill does not address the £400 million hit on charities caused by the removal of payable tax credits. There is much in the Bill about new ways of charitable giving. There is something about companies being able to write off the full cost, for example, of materials that they give charitably, as if that will somehow make up for the £400 million.

I asked the Church of England what the impact would be on its accounts—it will lose £12 million. I am not certain how that money will be found in the rather sparse collections made at my church—I make no criticism of my constituents, but there are not many in church at 8 am on Sundays. Indeed, there are only about 25, and there are limits to what they can give. All the Churches, not just the Church of England, will have to make up the deficit. That is the kind of detail that the Chancellor does not like being exposed.

Mention has been made of what is turning into a savings farce—the introduction of individual savings accounts and the abolition of PEPs and TESSAs. It is interesting to note in the Red Book that that gives the Treasury a profit in the financial year that we have just entered of £60 million, and £10 million next year. This is just another subtle way of trying to make savings look good and make money for the Treasury.

Right hon. and hon. Members have also mentioned the 6 per cent. increase in the fuel duty escalator, and we shall mention it again.

The debate so far has saddened me in that there has been no real consideration of the level of taxation. What is the right level of tax burden? We have not had a proper

[Mr. Michael Jack]

discussion about what we should tax. Comparisons are made between the lower marginal rates of tax in parts of continental Europe on items such as alcohol and diesel fuel and rates in the United Kingdom, but I am sure that no political party would advocate the 5 per cent. rate of VAT on fresh food which is typical of French taxation. That is a no-go area. It is important that all Front-Bench Members take note of the fact that, if they are to discuss levels of taxation, we should decide how much it is right for the public sector to take from the private citizen. At the same time, we should be honest with ourselves and say what are the tax go and no-go areas.

Another question that I want Ministers to answer is, what has happened to tax simplification? What has happened to the tax rewrite? Where are the clauses that people have been labouring on for the past two or three years? Labour embraced the exercise with enthusiasm when the idea was first mooted—I think that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) was its appointee to the Committee. Neither the Finance Bill nor any Bill published in parallel with it contains any clauses relating to tax simplification. Indeed, tax complication is the essence of this Bill. What has happened to that exercise? The Bill and the Budget make no mention of it.

The Government cannot escape the fact that, over the next three years, taxation levels are set to rise because of various measures in the Bill. Table 1.3 of the Red Book reveals that some of those measures that have not been discussed are, for example, the next financial year's delayed action hit in terms of national insurance charges—£430 million in 2000-01 and £750 million the following year.

That table has an intriguing little section called "Securing the tax base". I should be grateful if, when the Financial Secretary winds up the debate, she would give a little more detail about what is going on in securing the tax base, because I discover that, in that section of the Red Book, the abolition of mortgage interest relief is said to be securing the tax base—as though it were a tax fiddle. However, in the Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue press release for that item—press release CW 3—I find an oddball collection of measures under the heading "Securing the tax base".

The press release says that the measures will yield "more than £1 billion". That sounds good. One might suppose that it meant £1 billion a year, but no; it is £1 billion over the next three years. A third of a billion—£300 million or £350 million—is not much, so would the Financial Secretary care to tell us what those inspectors, whom I bequeathed to the Treasury before I left, and who deal with the complicated tax issues of larger companies and other institutions have been doing for the past two years? They were retained because of their detailed tax knowledge. I remember that the last tax fiddle that they found was worth about £0.5 billion a year, and they told me that, every so often, they found such things; so why is such a small sum being spent on securing the tax base? What has been going on? Parliament deserves a report about that.

In opposition, Labour Members were fond of saying, "We shall close the tax loopholes." Judging by press release CW 3, they have gone to sleep on this issue. We should be given more detail about that.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am not sure that my right hon. Friend is doing his mathematics the new Labour way. When he described a saving of £1 billion over three years, he assumed that that meant a third of billion a year. In new Labour mathematics, one starts with a sixth of a billion, in the second year one gets a third of a billion, in the third year one gets half a billion, and all three figures must be added together to reach £1 billion. My right hon. Friend said that a third of a billion was a small amount; a sixth of a billion is even less.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for admonishing me on the arithmetic, and he may well be right, which emphasises the point on which I am probing the Treasury Minister—what has been going on about something about which Labour Members were, in opposition, zealots and now, in government, they have gone to sleep over.

The Government have been very sneaky in the way that little measures such as the 1 per cent. increase in insurance premium tax have crept in. I seem to remember Labour opposing the introduction of that tax, which took place at a time when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was seeking ways to address the state of the public finances. Now the Government are slipping in measures to gain another couple of hundred million, rising to £300 million at the end of the period outlined in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". Not much has been said about that but, when people start to renew their insurance policies, they will realise what this new Labour Budget is about.

The sum total of the effect of all those tax changes is to be found in table B9 in the Red Book, dealing with current receipts, which is the sum total of the financial effects of this Finance Bill. In this financial year, gross receipts encompass 39.4 per cent. of gross domestic product. The percentages will be 39.5 next year, 39.6 the year after, 39.6 the following year and 39.7 at the end of the series, in 2003-04. Those figures take into account netting off, for example, the windfall tax, VAT, excise duties, social security contributions, other taxes and royalties, as well as income tax and the allowance for the tax credit. The percentage does not take into account the other hidden taxes—the increases in council tax, which people must bear as part of their personal tax burden.

Whichever way the Government try to wriggle on the hook of the question, "How are taxes going up under Labour?" the answer is that, in GDP terms, they are. It is no use Labour Members saying, "But if we had followed the Tories' forecasts, the percentage would have been higher." Well, I am sorry; on 1 May 1997, the present Government took over, and the responsibility for the economy passed to them.

When I consider in cash terms the combination of the measures that were introduced in 1998 but are yet to be introduced, and those in this year's Budget, I find that there is a net increase in the tax take over the next three financial years of, respectively £2.6 billion, £3.6 billion and £4 billion. Those are inescapable figures and cannot be denied. They are from the "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

In his opening remarks, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury told us that this was a business-friendly and investment-friendly Budget. If that is so, will the Financial Secretary explain later why chart A6, on page 141 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", shows business investment declining over the next two

years? She has until a late hour this evening to answer that question. When I asked the Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry that question, he frothed at the mouth. He did not recognise the truth in the graph that the Government have published.

Much of the Finance Bill is predicated on what the economy will do. Barclays bank, in its assessment of the Budget, told us that the projections on growth were more optimistic than it, and many other commentators, would predict. It will be interesting to note the extent to which the tax revenues anticipated in the statement are realised. Barclays bank's overall commentary on the Budget detail was more telling. It praised the

"Chancellor's emphasis on macroeconomic stability",

but continued,

"but some of the detailed structural reforms could be criticised as being confusing, over-complex and expensive to administer, particularly for small businesses. The structure of personal taxation has become more complex with an increase in the number of tax rates. Simplicity, stability and minimal compliance costs are important virtues for a fiscal framework looking to promote effective planning and productivity."

That is a telling and damning criticism of a Budget, and a Finance Bill, that have been published in the name of the so-called reforming Chancellor. If the Government consider themselves to be individual-friendly and company-friendly, they had better address that criticism, because it is not unique to Barclays bank.

The CBI bears out that point in its judgment about the Budget, in which it also draws attention to the growing burden of tax—£5 billion—on its members. It talks about the fact that

"Budget 99"

increased

"the burden of business taxation"

and it said there was

"little recognition of the concern about administrative burdens".

There we have it from the CBI, from Barclays bank and from other commentators.

The CBI says that the Budget reality disappointed after the pre-Budget rhetoric. It said:

"Against . . . encouraging background" –

the pre-Budget consultation—

"the steps actually taken in Budget 99 were somewhat disappointing."

That is from a body that is trying to do business with the Government.

The CBI also observes that a clause dealing with the 10p starting rate of income tax is a bit of a gimmick, and it similarly describes the 10p starting rate of corporation tax as such—because it applies only to the first £10,000 of profit. Thereafter, as profit increases, the tax increases very sharply. Those are not my words but those of the CBI, and it makes other detailed criticisms of the Bill.

The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants made another damning criticism of the cost of administration of the Budget, especially to small and medium-sized enterprises. It said:

"The cost of administration is around a third of the total tax bill. These new measures will impose further costs."

That is a damning criticism—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) disagrees, will he intervene and tell me why he disagrees with that respectable private body?

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, South): If the right hon. Gentleman reads the ACCA's newsletter more closely, he will see that it refers to many other measures in addition to the one that he has mentioned.

Mr. Jack: The first paragraph of the document reads:

"ACCA is disappointed that the government introduced further complex tax changes in last month's Budget."

There could be no more damning a sentence than that.

In the magazine *Taxation* we start getting towards some of the detail of the Bill and some of the problems that it contains. In a leading article, Malcolm Gunn points out the enormous complexity that is brought about by the number of tax rates with which we are now having to cope. He observes that there are four different rates of income tax plus the schedule F upper rate of 32.5 per cent. I would like to know from Ministers on the Treasury Bench why they are prepared to sanction such a complex range of taxes. As has already been said, savers will not get the benefit on their savings of the 10p starting rate, but will have to pay on the basic rate. Why is that? Why is it that people with modest savings, whom the hon. Member for Govan spoke about with such passion, are once again clobbered by the Government, who will not visit the benefit on savers, as we did, at the lowest starting rate for tax? The Government are wedded to complexity.

As Mr. Gunn said:

"This must be one of the most complex personal tax systems ever devised for the United Kingdom and the taxpayer, an uninformed layman".

As he observes, they have to operate the system on the pain of penalties and surcharges if they get it wrong. It is important that we take note of such comments, which are a damning criticism of what the Government are up to.

At the conclusion of his article, Mr. Gunn states:

"All this complexity is apparently to satisfy the political objective of introducing 'the lowest rate of income tax this country has seen for more than thirty-five years' – a statement which many consider to be little more than a devious political soundbite – coupled with the Treasury's insistence that the 20 per cent tax deducted from bank interest should not be repayable to the tiny number of taxpayers who are within the starting rate only."

That is how the experts see it, but let us consider in more detail clauses 19 and 20, which deal with the starting rate of 10p for tax.

I wonder whether Ministers on the Treasury Front Bench have had a chance to study the report produced by Mr. Paul Gregg of Her Majesty's Treasury and the centre for economic performance at the London school of economics, Mr. Paul Johnson of the Financial Services Authority and by Mr. Howard Reed of the Institute for Fiscal Studies. They have costed the effect of the measures to which I have referred. In their study, published by the Rowntree Trust, they state that the cost per person who is helped back into work by the 10p starting rate of tax will be £3,947. They calculate that 76,000 will be helped back into work. They calculate also that the working families tax credit, which they estimate will help about 92,000 people back into work, costs a

[Mr. Jack]

mere £869 per person. The national insurance reforms, which will help 115,000 people back into work, will cost £1,826 per person.

Messrs. Gregg, Johnson and Reed conclude that the 10p starting rate of income tax appears to be the least cost-effective reform, perhaps because it is not as well targeted on specific people who are more likely to move into work as the working families tax credit. They go on to press the benefits of the national insurance changes.

Mr. Gardiner: Given that the right hon. Gentleman has quoted the Rowntree figures with such approbation, will he confirm that it is his view that, as a result of the Budget and the changes that will be effected therein, more than 260,000 people will be brought back into work?

Mr. Jack: The report does not highlight the alternative to that, which is whether there may have been other relevant activities in the economy. Although there has been a slowdown in some sectors, unemployment had until fairly recently carried on declining. When talking about a new deal, there was an argument about the dead-weight effect of that measure. The argument involved whether the natural cycling of jobs and changes in the economy might well have produced new employment opportunities.

I must be fair to the hon. Gentleman because, having quoted an analysis, I must accept that it indicates, in the judgment of those who produced it, that some people will be induced back to work. If someone finds a job after a period of unemployment, we would wish to support that and none of us would disagree.

I am talking about the effective use of money that we are asked to approve in the Bill. The report to which I have referred imputes a cost of £3 billion for the 10p starting rate of tax. That money could have raised the starting point to £5,000. That could be said succinctly to be £100 a week tax free. That might have had an even greater effect in inducing people back to work.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I must caution my right hon. Friend. If he reads the Red Book, it tells us that 58,000 people have been helped back into work by the new deal. In fact, that is simply the churn. There are more than 30,000 additional people in the 18 to 24-year-old group who are unemployed than when the new deal started, and the scheme has not even been going for a year yet.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend, who studies these matters with keenness and assiduousness, makes an important point. I hope that when he makes his own contribution to the debate he will be able to develop these matters.

The Bill seeks to make changes to vehicle excise duty. The Government were happy to triumph the fact that they had taken £50 off VED. However, they increased by £5 the licence fee for any cars with engines larger than 1100 cc. Perhaps Treasury Ministers could tell us how they decided that 1100 cc was to be the start-and-finish point of this measure. I am struggling, but I suspect that the real answer is that there are 25.6 million cars, of which about 2.3 million have engines smaller than 1100 cc. The cost of exempting 2.3 million cars from that increase in order to reduce VED by £50 equates exactly with £5 on for the remaining 23 million vehicles.

The bizarre feature is that the Government have triumphed this measure as a way of encouraging more environmentally friendly cars. I do not know whether the Financial Secretary is aware that the target that 1100 cc cars are supposed to be able to meet is a CO_2 volume emission of 140 g per kilogram per year. There are cars in the 1.5 to 1.9 litre category which achieve that objective already. They are diesel cars. If the Treasury is being consistent, why did it draw the line at 1100 cc in trying to encourage environmentally friendly cars, when there are other environmentally friendly cars with larger engines that do the same thing that are clobbered by an increase in VED?

Will the Financial Secretary promise to publish the detailed sales analysis that shows that the consultation exercise that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is carrying out on the tiered structure of VED will achieve its objective? I cannot see that changing VED by £100 or so a year will have the slightest effect on the purchase of the majority of cars in this country, when 55 per cent. of those cars are purchased by companies. Employees have little chance to influence the sales decision. It seems that the Government have introduced a Trojan horse to try to raise yet more money from the motorist. It was introduced as a revenue-neutral measure, yet the Red Book tells us that there will be an increase in tax revenue in the first year of £40 million. Perhaps the Financial Secretary will explain how a revenue-neutral measure will raise an extra £40 million in the first year.

Mr. Gardiner: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way to me again. On his argument about diesel, it is important to reflect on the fact that more than 85 per cent. of the diesel that is consumed in this country is consumed by large lorries and not by small cars such as the ones to which he referred.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman misses the point. I do not think that he has read in full the Chancellor's consultation document. I urge him to do so because it is very good for insomniacs. The document shows where the direction that the Chancellor's thinking is taking. We see in the proposal a piecemeal approach and, for the sake of a headline--reduced vehicle excise duty--a limit of 1100 cc. There is no logic to that, or to the rest of the consultation exercise.

Other right hon. and hon. Members who have contributed to the debate mentioned the fuel duty escalator. I find it intriguing that Labour Members attack the former Conservative Administration for having introduced it, but I notice that, when Labour came to power, it did not seek to reverse that policy. If the Government had wanted to get rid of the escalator, they could have done so, but they did not do so - they just doubled it.

Mr. Leslie: Am I right in recalling that the right hon. Gentleman was Financial Secretary to the Treasury between 1995 and 1997? Am I right in thinking that he was responsible for partially implementing a fuel duty escalator? Will he now say that he was wrong to increase diesel duty by more than 10 per cent. in each of those years while he was a Minister?

Mr. Jack: If the hon. Gentleman was aware of the duties of the Financial Secretary when I had the honour

to hold that post, he would realise that I personally did not introduce that tax. However, I take collective responsibility. The Administration of whom I was a part did that. I do not want to trespass into an "all our yesterdays" debate on the state of the economy—*[Interruption.]* If you would allow me to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should be happy to do so, as I am proud of our record.

The short answer is that we are dealing with the Labour Government's response to our criticism of the fact that, as a result of their escalator, diesel fuel in the United Kingdom is the most expensive in Europe. I remember that, when the fuel price was going up, we looked forward to an ending of problems in the middle east, so that the lower oil price would constitute a lower input cost for Britain's business and transport, but that has not happened under new Labour.

A reduction in the oil price to $10 a barrel—the lowest price ever—results in the most expensive diesel fuel and highly taxed petrol in Europe. That is a perverse situation. The increase in inflation that has been announced is entirely down to the Budget measures.

Mr. Ian Bruce: In trying to be fair to the House, my right hon. Friend is perhaps being unfair to himself and the previous Government. Is he aware that the Automobile Association has conducted a survey on the effect of the Conservative Government's escalator on fuel prices, which found that people economised and that the amount of fuel burnt has gone down, despite mileage going up? The AA concluded that further taxes would be foolish. It would simply ensure that people bought their fuel in France.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. If the Government wanted to be radical, why did they not assure motor manufacturers that they would examine the VAT rate on the price of cars, and find a way of recognising more environmentally friendly cars by making them genuinely cheaper? If they had wanted to, the Government could have made an adjustment to the corporation tax of motor dealers to reflect the sales pattern of more environmentally friendly cars. Why did the Government not use the carrot, instead of using the fiscal stick? That is what worries me.

I shall now examine three clauses in detail. Clause 45 deals with the provision and support of bus services. Can the Financial Secretary explain why the Government have sought to provide help for services using buses with a seating capacity of 17 or more? Do they not realise that, in a rural environment, a company that hires a small minibus to pick up people and bring them to work, for example, to save wear and tear on the rural transport infrastructure, will specifically not get help under the provision?

Is that yet another anti-rural measure from the Government? Can the Minister explain why London-based companies are induced by the measure to clog up London's roads even more with large buses, whereas no relief is given on the provision of season tickets for employees wishing to use the rather more environmentally friendly transport system in London—the railway? Why is that?

In clause 47, we see that Treasury Ministers have been busy. The clause deals with tax relief on company-provided cycles and cyclists' safety equipment. We discover that that relief is available only for the purposes of the "qualified journey", which is a journey between the individual's home and workplace or between one workplace and another. Does that mean that representatives of the Inland Revenue will be outside Tesco on Saturday, watching to see whether an employee has ridden on his company bicycle to do his shopping? It is the theatre of the absurd. The Financial Secretary should consider in more detail the practical application of the measure.

Finally, I shall deal with clause 27 and schedule 3. Clause 27 introduces the children's tax credit. I am intrigued by the wording at the beginning of schedule 3. In order for us to judge whether the measure is practical, can the Financial Secretary explain the wording in paragraph 1, which states:

"Paragraphs 2 to 5 below apply where at any time in a year of assessment—

(a) a husband and wife are living together or a man and a woman are living together as husband and wife"?

What period does the phrase "at any time" cover? Is it one minute or the whole year? How are people to know whether they have fulfilled the time criterion to qualify? Will we see "Blind Date"-type marriages being entered into so that people can gain the benefit of the tax relief? What is the Treasury's definition of a man and a woman who are living together as husband and wife? I do not know how the Government will deal with the practical implications of that.

I recommend that the Financial Secretary look at paragraph 8(4) dealing with change of circumstances. That is a direct read-across from the provisions applying to the Child Support Agency. All right hon. and hon. Members should examine the provision. If our constituents ask how the tax relief is to be apportioned when two parents have care of the child and both might be eligible for the tax relief, right hon. and hon. Members will find that paragraph 8(4) is a nightmare of complexity. It is typical of the Bill.

I look forward to a detailed examination of the measure in Committee. It will be interesting to discover how the Financial Secretary defines marriage, cohabitation and all the other intimate activities of the same people who might be using their company-provided bicycle to do their shopping, and who may not be able to ride on a small bus to their workplace. The Bill contains some interesting and intimate details, but it all adds up to a tax fiddlers charter and an accountants benefit.

6.28 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) did not welcome the introduction of the 10p starting rate of income tax. I take a longer view of such matters. I look on it as an early instalment of what I hope will be a more progressive tax system which will in due course be made possible by self-assessment.

To me, the most important part of the Finance Bill and the aspect that I particularly welcome is the ending of mortgage interest relief and the married couples allowance, and the use of that money for industry, children and the introduction of the 10p rate, among other measures.

Why have we had mortgage interest relief for so long? What was it for? We all know that housing is a necessity; the need for a roof over one's head and the need for basic

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

amenities are therefore a case for subsidy—or at least for freedom from certain forms of taxation. In common with other forms of expenditure, however, once those essential needs have been met, further expenditure becomes not a necessity but an option.

If a person lives in a small council flat or house, that needs to be subsidised, or at least to be outside the tax system. A person must be housed. If that person has funds available for more expensive and comfortable housing, at some stage such housing must be seen, if not as a suitable subject for tax, at least as a suitable subject for the removal of any element of subsidy. It is an anomaly that sumptuous housing has been given substantial subsidies, while the fitting out and furnishing that are part of that more expensive move are not subsidised but taxed, mainly at the rate of 17.5 per cent. That needs to be included in the consideration of all aspects of subsidies set against taxation.

Moreover, the number of anomalies has increased rather than being reduced. For a house owner, expenditure on housing is treated as an investment comparable with other forms of investment. Dealing with that was the main purpose of the old schedule A income tax, which attributed notional income from the ownership of a house and treated it in the same way as income from other forms of investment. That tax, which was always modestly assessed, constituted at least an attempt to balance expenditure that produced a benefit with the return on other investments that produced dividends. It is supremely nonsensical that investment in a company that creates employment, and enriches the community through its overseas sales and by providing and using industrial and technical expertise, should be taxed, while the use of funds to improve a person's life style is not only not taxed, but subsidised.

House ownership provides other forms of subsidy. When capital gains tax was introduced, people's main residences were exempt, which ratcheted up the financial advantages of purchasing a house. As a result, many people now look to a housing ladder of opportunity, not just to improve their comfort or convenience—which is subsidised—but to enrich themselves by engaging in a purchase whose profits will not be taxed. Of course such moves have always been made, and no one can fault them, but encouragement has been introduced on a grand scale, and, to a large extent, house price inflation has been a consequence of that.

On top of all the advantages that I have mentioned, mortgage interest relief confers the ability to borrow at a subsidised rate to secure the benefits involved. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was right to remove one of the greatest distortions in the tax system, and I applaud him unreservedly for doing so. The other distortion that he is removing, by means of clause 28, is the married couples allowance.

Before the war, income tax was essentially a tax on the middle class. On marrying, a woman—even if she had been working—was expected to stay at home to look after the home and the children. Indeed, in the case of many professions and occupations, she was debarred from continuing in her job. The banks traditionally provided jobs for middle class women. There was no glass ceiling for those who married; they received the bank's good wishes, and their employment automatically ended. In the case of many couples, there were not two earners. The taxable capacity of the single earner was reduced, and the tax laws took that into account. Looking after his wife was a financial burden for a man.

The war brought about a number of important changes in the taxation structure. The amount of overtime worked took many employees into the income tax structure, which now applied not just to the middle class, but to many members of the working class. That led to the pay-as-you-earn system. There was a need for married women to be brought into the work force, which meant that the disincentive caused by the removal of the wife's allowance on her taking up of employment had to end. The allowance therefore continued, although the working wife no longer represented the financial expense for which the allowance had been intended to provide. That nonsense has persisted for 60 years—up to the present time, when 67 per cent. of wives work.

Having children is an expense that reduces taxable capacity. The child tax allowance took account of that in the same way as the wife's allowance took account of the reduction in the taxable capacity of the earner. In this instance, whether or not the partner of the earner is working, the child and its needs will clearly reduce the taxable capacity of the family. On that principle, when child benefit was introduced in 1976-77, an agreement was made between the main parties that it would not count as public expenditure. I am therefore sorry to note the apparent uncertainty in the Opposition's attitude to some of these matters. Nowadays, I am much more relaxed about the distinction between tax reliefs and negative expenditures: if it proves satisfactory, I am happy to accept it.

I believe that the fundamental principle of taxation is taxable capacity, which refers to the income that is available after all essential expenditures have been allowed for. That, of course, begs the question of what is "essential", but, as Members of Parliament, it is a question that we must assess ourselves. A consequence is that actions that reduce taxable capacity ought to be considered for tax allowances, or concessions of some kind. I think it right to bring the matter into the open now, while we are discussing two clauses that have such a bearing on it.

We all know the position relating to employees' expenses that are allowable against income tax only when they are wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred. Little difficulty is involved in dealing with expenses that are wholly and exclusively incurred, which must remain eligible for tax relief; the problem arises with the condition of their having to be necessarily incurred. The trouble with that condition is that employees are not often in a position to pick and choose. It is often a case of, "Do you take this job or not?"

People used to work close to where they lived. They would live around the corner from the pit, the mill or a factory that dominated the local scene. That is not the case today, however, and we need to deal with the anomalies in expenditures that are incurred in what is defined as earning a living. The main expenditure is caused by the cost of travel to work, which has increased substantially, especially for those with fairly modest incomes, who used to work locally.

Today, people travel distances that used to be typical only in London. A number of my constituents travel daily across the Pennines to Bradford and Leeds, a regular

journey which would have been inconceivable 20 or so years ago. The travel-to-work area has expanded and continues to expand as people seek job opportunities where they can be found. There must be a strong case for recognising that, and recognising the need to take it into account in the tax structure.

I know the difficulties. I understand the nightmares that the Inland Revenue would experience if a breach of the rules were sanctioned. In the context of returning people to work, however—an important element of the Budget and the Bill—the problems need to be addressed.

There are other expenditures. People must wear reasonable clothes to work. That used not to be the case; many people who worked in the pit or the mill could wear what they liked.

Mr. Burnett: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, expenses incurred in travel to and from work are not allowable in the case of either schedule E or schedule D employees. Not even self-employed people are allowed to claim them against tax. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the huge cost that such an allowance would generate in revenue terms?

Mr. Sheldon: I am not asking for an allowance; I am merely saying that the facts need to be recognised in some way.

I was talking about clothing. In a famous case, a barrister's clothes were deemed to be allowable as an expense. As for meals, workers used to take a jam butty to work, but nowadays more substantial meals are involved, which means further expenses.

Mr. Cousins: Does my right hon. Friend not think that the Government have for the first time begun to recognise return-to-work expenses? Introducing to income support a provision under which lone parents who return to work under the Government's policies and schemes retain income support payments for the first two weeks of their return to work acknowledges the costs of going back to work. I accept that that is but a small step, but does he agree that recognising such expenses for the first time is important?

Mr. Sheldon: That is exactly what I am arguing for. Such expenses cannot be wholly allowable for income tax, but they have to be recognised and must receive some understanding and some concession in respect of the way in which these matters are raised or are to be considered.

People who are not in work have to accept a whole range of such costs when they come into work, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) rightly points out. For example, when my constituents add up the cost of travelling across the Pennines against remaining on benefit, they might say that working is not worth their while. We have to make it worth their while. I regard travel expenses as legitimate and, although they should not be taken wholly into account in relief from tax, there should be some understanding of the problems that people face.

The Scottish National party has joined the Liberal party in wanting to refuse the 1p reduction in income tax in order to use that 1p for expenditure. It is difficult to persuade people that tax increases will lead to increased spending; we find them rather sceptical about that, because, before they will accept tax increases, they need to be confident that the taxes will be used for the purposes that they support. The relationship between taxation and the particular expenditure that people want is based on a trust which many do not have. In present terms, that is the case for relating taxation to expenditure in certain very limited circumstances.

Anyone who has served in the Treasury has a visceral feeling about hypothecation: the road fund licence still casts its shadow 70 years on. An important weakness of hypothecation is that it does not take account of changing patterns of priorities in expenditure. In a moment of weakness, one might hypothecate a tax and regret it subsequently, because an element of expenditure has become less important than it was when the tax was introduced.

There is, however, one instance in which the objections to hypothecation are met—the national health service. One thing is clear to me: the cost of the NHS will rise ever faster than the rate of inflation or even growth in the economy. That is because the population are ageing—there are also other reasons—and, as wants are met, those of health will perhaps become the major area of increasing expenditure.

The time is coming when we shall need to think more about either private medicine, which I do not favour, or a special NHS tax. As I have said about health, one certain aspect is that demand will increase into the indefinite future. People may be more willing to accept an NHS tax—rather than other taxes, which disappear in the vast generality of public expenditure—if they can see the direct consequences of that expenditure. The time has surely come when the introduction of such a tax ought to be explored sensibly and not rejected out of hand, which it always is.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I am greatly interested in what the right hon. Gentleman has said about hypothecated tax, particularly in relation to the NHS. Given the willingness of all Governments eventually to cheat on any hypothecated tax, does he agree that, if such a tax were introduced for the NHS, the NHS would have to be funded in perpetuity from one tax that would be clearly targeted on that item of expenditure, with no subsidies from other forms of taxation?

Mr. Sheldon: The hon. Gentleman discusses a particular form of a tax; I am putting the general point that this matter needs to be explored sensibly. Demand for the NHS will increase and people do not have confidence that the money that they have to give up to spend in taxes is going on the purposes on which they want it to go. In this particular instance, a closer relationship between taxation and expenditure is called for.

I welcome the Finance Bill as I have welcomed the Budget. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has tackled two of the major distortions of our tax system. They have been known for many years; he had the courage and the resolution to deal with them.

6.45 pm

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): It is always a great pleasure to speak after the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). I have always respected him. In the mid-1970s, I kept him up all night

[Sir Michael Spicer]

when he was a Treasury Minister and we were fighting each other—not physically, but across the Floor of the House—on Finance Bill Committees. He was involved with the development land tax.

I want to dwell for a moment on the idea of taxable capacity, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. I may have misunderstood him, but the effect of what he said seemed to be that we should work out someone's taxable capacity and then tax him to the hilt, according to the definition that had been established for him. That is not my idea of a tax; at least, I would draw the line very much lower than the right hon. Gentleman probably would. Taxation should be minimised and used as sparingly as possible, and people should be allowed to keep as much as possible of the money that they have earned so that they have an incentive to work and invest. Perhaps that is why he is on that side of the House and I am on this side.

I return to the central question of taxation, which has been troubling the House throughout the evening, although there is common ground. We are almost unanimous that, taking into account the accumulated effect of all the Budgets introduced by this Government, taxes will go up over the next three years. Even the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Treasury, distanced himself from the one organisation that apparently does not agree with the proposition that tax is going up—the Government.

The hon. Gentleman was very fair on this matter. He is a powerful and highly respected Chairman—I hope that I have not done his career, which is beginning to burgeon, enormous harm—who has the command and respect of the Committee. He has tried to produce as fair a report as he can in the circumstances. It is remarkable—mystifying, to be honest—that the Government are sticking to the position that taxes are not going up.

Proof that the Government are sticking to that position comes from the Committee itself. When the Chancellor appeared before us, he was quite clear. I asked:

"Would you not accept that the net effect of your three budgets over the next three years has been to raise taxes?"

He answered:

"No, I do not accept that."

The Government are still maintaining the position that taxes are not going up over the next three years, even if all the Budgets are compounded, so it is worth spending a little time trying to draw from them either a confession that they are wrong or further justification for their perpetuation of this extraordinary myth. The public will rumble to it, and soon. As has been said, it does not matter too much to the taxpayer whose taxes are going up when a tax was announced; what really counts is the fact that it is going up.

Evidently, one has to go over this ground again and, to begin, I shall raise with the House certain relevant matters which have not been mentioned in the form that I wish to use. First, no one has yet mentioned the Committee's general acceptance of the fact that, if one compounds all the Budgets, one finds that taxes are going up over the next three years. Its report says that

"the Red Book ... publishes a table ... which lists the impact of pre-announced changes which are due to come into effect over the next three years. These pre-announced changes amount to a tax increase of £3.7 billion for the year about to start, a tax increase of £8.0 billion for the following year and a tax increase of £[illegible] billion for the year after that. These tax increases are larger than the tax cuts announced in the Budget. Hence as our expert witness Andrew Dilnot of the Institute for Fiscal Studies summarised: 'In terms of tax changes, there is no question but that taxes will be going up in April of this year, up in the April after that and up in the April after that.'"

That is all very plain English. As has been said already, Government supporters are in the majority on the Treasury Committee, so that is an extraordinarily significant quotation.

The Government say, "Ah, but it is all a question of taxes as a percentage of gross domestic product over the next three years." However, as the hon. Member for North Durham pointed out, even if we take account of the various different ways in which GDP is presented, the picture still shows that taxes will rise as a percentage of GDP over the next three years.

That conclusion can be drawn even on the basis of the Government's assumptions in the Red Book about what GDP will be, which are that it will increase by 1 to 1.5 per cent. in 1999, and by 2.25 to 2.75 per cent. in 2000. Those figures look increasingly over-optimistic, and, if they turn out to be so, taxes as a percentage of GDP will go up even faster than the Government—or the Treasury Committee, which has accepted the Government's figures for GDP—now presume.

It is therefore fair to ask whether the forecast GDP figures are accurately estimated. The Red Book forecast for 2000 expects growth, having tapered off, suddenly to jump up again. There is not much explanation for that jump, so it is reasonable to ask why it has been forecast.

When we look at the changing features of the economic landscape, we see at least two reasons for being concerned about the figures. The first, which has already been mentioned, is the strength of the pound, especially against the euro. Unless the euro is expected suddenly, out of the blue, to strengthen against the pound, that relative position is likely to be maintained through the period to which the GDP forecast applies. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for North Durham says, "Not necessarily." I shall give way to him if he wants me to.

The German economy looks as if it might be teetering on the brink of another recession. Given the weaknesses of that economy, and the present signs that the French economy, too, may be going back into weakness, the argument that the pound may fall in value against the euro lacks any real basis.

The Government should at least say what they think will change—to speed up growth in exports, for example—so as to give their GDP figures some sort of credibility. Even today, another factor has emerged that has to be taken into account. It would seem that the Government's inflation target will be exceeded.

Mr. Pearson *indicated dissent.*

Sir Michael Spicer: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but today the underlying rate of inflation has risen to 2.7 per cent.—0.2 percentage points above the target. To be fair to the Government, the target is not vague; they have enshrined it in law. It is a legal target, with which the Monetary Policy Committee has to comply, and towards which its interest rate policies must be directed.

When representatives of the MPC appear before the Select Committee again, I shall certainly ask them, "Why are you bringing down interest rates when there are strong indications—in the labour market, they have been there all along—that inflation is moving upwards again? It is the MPC's duty not to lower interest rates, but to raise them."

Most commentators would at least accept the fact that interest rates, which are still relatively high, will not come down very fast in the near future. Indeed, on the basis of today's evidence, they will rise. There is therefore a serious question mark against the present forecast for GDP, especially as manufacturing industry is in the middle of a bad recession.

I do not know what the unemployment figures will show tomorrow, but it would come as no surprise to many hon. Members if they began to register an upward movement, or at least were higher than the Government expected.

As I have said, it is fair to ask whether the GDP figures represent an accurate forecast. If they do not, and GDP is lower than forecast, that puts even more of a question mark against all the forecasts, including those by the Government, of taxation as a percentage of GDP. To me, at least, it would be a serious matter if taxation were to rise as a percentage of GDP.

That may be a serious matter to me, because philosophically, that is where I come from. I cannot understand, however, why the Government are so coy on the subject. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne was, in a sense, enunciating a policy of higher taxation. He said, "Find out people's capacity to be soaked, and then get them."

Mr. Sheldon: I must defend myself. I simply said that, whatever the level of taxation was, the principle that I enunciated applied. Within that principle, taxation can be low or high. The important point that I made was about the cost of getting people back to work when they considered themselves disadvantaged by the costs involved in earning a living. I was saying that, through taxation or in some other way, that must be taken into account.

Sir Michael Spicer: Perhaps I did not understand the right hon. Gentleman; perhaps I was caricaturing his view—but I do not think that I was caricaturing the view that is held, by and large, within his party. There are certainly hon. Members sitting around him—although not directly behind him, where we see the hon. Member for North Durham—who think that the Government's job is to find out what the capacity for tax is, to tax people and then to spend and distribute the money. That is what socialism is all about.

What happened to the real socialists? There are lots of them. Where are they all? They will come out of the woodwork at some point. What is the Government's problem? They would be cheered by their Back Benchers if they were truthful and said, "Actually, we are a socialist Government, and that means that we shall put up taxes and expenditure."

That is what socialism is all about. That is what people vote for or against at general elections. That is why most of the time they vote Conservative, and why they will go on voting Conservative in the future—because, basically, they do not like that approach to life. None the less, it could be seen as perfectly reasonable. Indeed, it has gone on for thousands of years. *[Laughter.]* The idea of taxing people has an honourable parentage. I suppose that it has its basis in the work of Rousseau. That may not date back a thousand years, but the idea also goes back to Aristotle and various other philosophers who had the idea of taxing people and distributing wealth. People had their reasons for that—so it is a mystery to me why the Government are confusing themselves, and trying to confuse the public, about taxation.

One fact, if nothing else, will emerge from the debate: there is a common position among members of the Treasury Committee that taxes are rising. It is up to the Minister to stand up at some point and tell us why.

Mr. Radice: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Michael Spicer: Of course I shall give way to my boss.

Mr. Radice: There is a common position that, taking all three Budgets into account, the tax burden, in terms of tax receipts as a share of GDP, will rise over the period. That is right, but there is also a common position that this year's Budget cuts taxes. I hope that the hon. Gentleman—whom I was about to call my hon. Friend—agrees with that, because it is what the Select Committee report said, and he did not vote against it. Nor did he vote against the Committee's general approval of Government economic strategy, about which we have heard little.

Sir Michael Spicer: The Opposition are wise to keep very quiet when they are getting something through that they thought they might not get through. In this case, it was a massive achievement; it made sense to keep very quiet when we accepted the consensus that taxes would go up in the next three years. That was a significant statement, and it was worth sitting quietly and not stirring up matters too much.

My view is that it has still not been fully determined whether taxes have gone up in the Budget. I am willing to concede that there may have been some comeback on the swingeing wave of taxation that was introduced in previous Budgets and from which we shall suffer. It is extraordinary that the Government do not accept that taxes are going up. Even the hon. Member for North Durham distanced himself from the Government and said that they must answer for themselves. I hope that they do, but at the moment they are still trying to maintain the myth that taxes are not going up when everyone accepts—the Treasury Committee included—that they are.

There is one tax in the Finance Bill that dare not speak its name. It hangs like a black thundercloud over our economy. A withholding tax of 20 per cent. on financial savings may be introduced. It hangs like a thundercloud because the Government will not say that they will prevent such a tax. The proposition is on the table through a European Commission directive. It was discussed at the informal summit of Finance Ministers at ECOFIN last week, and it was not rejected.

I had the honour of asking the Deputy Prime Minister a question last Wednesday. I can think of three reasons why it was strange that he did not have the faintest idea what a withholding tax was. First, if such a tax were

[Sir Michael Spicer]

introduced, it would be of enormous significance to the City of London. Financial services, direct and indirect, account for 25 per cent. of our GDP. That is more than the 23 per cent. accounted for by manufacturing industry, which is likely to shrink further as a result of the Government's policies. Financial services represent a higher proportion of GDP than the entirety of our manufacturing industry. The Deputy Prime Minister did not know that this tax may be imposed on our financial sector. There is no question what the effect would be, because it would be exactly the same as it was when it was imposed in New York. The whole of the bond market there moved across to London—from where it would move straight to Switzerland were this tax to be imposed in this country. It is strange that the Deputy Prime Minister did not have the faintest idea of what this tax is about, given that it is so important.

The second reason for surprise at the right hon. Gentleman's lack of knowledge is the fact that a withholding tax was due to be discussed at ECOFIN in Dresden last Saturday. Other Cabinet Ministers also did not have the faintest idea about this tax—I bumped into one yesterday, but I shall not reveal who it was, because it would not be fair. The significance of that is that it has not been discussed in Cabinet. It is of great concern that the Government are giving mixed assurances on a matter that is of such vital importance to a sector that accounts for 25 per cent. of our GDP without having discussed it properly in Cabinet.

The third reason why the Deputy Prime Minister should have known what was going on is that, in the past few months, Ministers have been giving mixed, but sometimes firm, assurances on this matter in the House of Commons. In the Treasury Committee, I asked the Economic Secretary:

"Does that mean you would veto any tax regime which included a withholding tax?"

She answered:

"We would not accept a directive that required Member States to introduce a withholding tax."

I said:

"That means you would veto any such regime."

She replied:

"That is correct."

That was a serious answer by a Treasury Minister to the Treasury Committee. Were the Government to give way on this matter, and were there not to be a veto, the Economic Secretary's position would be extremely difficult to maintain—I wish that she were here to hear me say that, as she has been present for most of the debate. She told the Treasury Committee that the Government would veto the withholding tax if it were necessary to do so.

In a way, she was supported by the Chancellor in his evidence to the Treasury Committee, which is published in its fourth report. He began on good form. I asked him:

"Will you be vetoing the withholding tax if it is necessary to do so when it comes to finance ministers on 17 April?"

The Chancellor said:

"We will take whatever action is necessary. I have said before that we are not prepared to introduce the withholding tax in Britain".

So far, so good. He went on:

"We are fully appraised of the national interests in this matter and I do not think you and I would be in disagreement about that."

I replied:

"Except that I cannot actually hear you saying you will veto the tax."

We went on like that for a bit, and then I said:

"Are you going back on what your economic secretary said when she said, 'That is correct'?"

which was in answer to the question I had put to her about a veto. The Chancellor said:

"Of course I am not going back on it. In many ways, I think the statement I am making is the strongest that can be made."

Again, so far, so good. He gave a firm assurance on the matter. He then said:

"I think you are misunderstanding me. I am saying we will take whatever action is necessary to protect our position in this matter."

I asked whether that included the veto. He replied:

"That includes taking whatever action is necessary."

I again asked:

"Does it include the veto?"

To which he replied:

"It may on certain occasions include the veto; it may not".

It is a serious matter when senior Ministers, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, give mixed signals on a tax that would cause untold damage if it were imposed on this country. It is serious because a Minister is on record as saying that a specific action would be taken, and the Chancellor has said that he would do everything necessary to prevent such a tax being introduced, but that he might or might not use the veto. When it came to the ECOFIN discussions last Saturday, according to the reports of the meeting, the Government seemed to back away from any confrontation on this matter. The issue was deferred for two or three weeks, and no pronouncements were made to reassure people who are extremely worried about this tax, because it would cripple much of our financial sector, which is the strongest in the world bar none. It is stronger than New York and any other financial capital in the world. It is the great British success story.

It is outrageous that the Government should even flirt with the idea of imposing a tax on the City that would threaten that position: people in Frankfurt and New York would dearly love that to happen. As a result, the business of the City of London would move to Switzerland, and the buildings that are currently being erected would remain as shells. That may not be music to the ears of the Labour party because it does not care too much about the City, but this Government are the custodians of our economy and those facts are, therefore, enormously important.

Mr. Cousins: The hon. Gentleman's argument is somewhat tortured. Is he suggesting that, if the Government were to negotiate a position with the other members of the European Union so that the eurobond market in the City was outside the scope of any of the taxes that he is imagining—so no veto had to be exercised—he would regard that as a satisfactory outcome? Or is he saying that because he lived under the lash of the handbag and was subjected to that pain for so many years that he wants the Government to exercise the veto as a proper display of power? That is a ridiculous position.

Sir Michael Spicer: I am saying that one has to establish one's position firmly in any negotiations if one

wants them to go the right way. I do not have any confidence from recent public pronouncements that the Government will do what they initially said that they would do to defend this country's interests. The Government have begun to show mixed signals. We no longer need a crystal ball, because we can read the book in so far as it has been printed—of the meeting that took place last Saturday, and it seems that the Government shied away from taking a firm stance. The hon. Gentleman may not care too much about that because it may not be part of his philosophy to defend the City, but in so far as the Government's policy was to defend the City and its interests, and its contribution to GDP—the emerging picture is a shabby one. If that is the case, the Government's position will be traded off, and that will be serious for this country and for the Government because of the commitments that have been made by some Ministers.

Mr. Tyrie: If such an exclusion were negotiated for the UK, is it my hon. Friend's view that we would be hurt anyway because financial services are increasingly seen in a European or global context and our exclusion would not be sufficient fully to protect us? Is not the whole history of the European Union one in which, if countries have exclusions, the Commission makes proposals some years later to bring them back into the ambit of the tax or controls?

Sir Michael Spicer: I agree with my hon. Friend. The attacks on the City are coming from different directions, with most of them originating from Brussels. The most significant was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who said that one of the most worrying aspects of what the Government were doing to the City, and to the economy generally, was the introduction of massive new regulatory regimes. The FSA, and the Bill that will introduce it, are a source of enormous concern. The FSA started as a smallish operation to try to help a few consumers who the Government claimed had had a bad deal, but it has turned into a monster. The Bill will give the FSA huge powers; and it will be able to determine its own size and powers. That is causing grave concern among those who have the interests of the financial sector at heart. The withholding tax is just part of a much wider picture of a Government who are not interested in what really makes a market such as the City of London flourish.

Mr. Tyrie: The Government have not grasped it.

Sir Michael Spicer: That is another way of looking at it. The Government do not have much more time to grasp it—only another year or so.

The Government are a tax and spend Government. They try to disguise that, but their whole philosophy is based on tax and spend and the distribution of the taxes they collect. The Government have created their strange and rather absurd golden rule, which allows expenditure to take place without proper funding and rules about taxation. Therefore, it is doubly surprising that they should try to pretend that the Budget is not part of a tax-raising strategy. It manifestly is, as has been determined by outside commentators and by the Select Committee on the Treasury.

7.16 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I do not intend to follow the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) in analysing the Treasury Committee's report, because I wish to make a few brief points, especially about excise duties—on cigarettes, alcohol and the fuel duty escalator—and their effect on my constituency.

I welcome the Finance Bill and the Budget. The measures they contain will have a marked effect on my constituency, which is an area of high unemployment. We are trying to regenerate the local economy and many of the measures in the Bill will do much to help that—in particular, the lower rates of income tax, the measures to help families, the increases in child benefit, the children's tax credit and the investment in schools and hospitals. The measures to encourage work will also be of great benefit.

In the past few years, I have welcomed successive Governments' commitments to reducing smoking. My constituency suffers from a high incidence of smoking-related diseases and we would welcome any initiative that reduced levels of smoking. Sadly, increasing numbers of young women are taking up smoking, which is very worrying. Successive Governments have used the Budget and the Finance Bill to increase tax on tobacco products to try to reduce smoking, but for young women the effect of those measures has slowed down or they are simply not working. One of the reasons for that—although it is not the only reason—is the difference in duty between cigarettes legally purchased in this country and the duty in France and the other countries of Europe on cigarettes and tobacco products which are smuggled into this country and illegally resold through various outlets or by individuals. It is easy to obtain cheap tobacco products, which defeats the worthwhile objectives of successive Governments in increasing tobacco taxes to reduce smoking.

An interesting article recently described an analysis of discarded cigarette packets at a football ground. Three out of every four packets collected were imported and had not been sold legally in the UK. That gives some idea of the amount of smuggling, which is, to some extent, defeating the Government's objective and removing revenue from the Treasury.

Smuggling also affects retailers. A constituent of mine, a former miner, invested some redundancy money in cigarette machines, but has begun to regret it because he cannot compete with the prices of cigarettes smuggled into the United Kingdom and then resold.

Mr. Rowe: The other end of that chain lies in my constituency, which is full of sinister criminal families who have moved to Kent because there is more profit to be derived from smuggling tobacco than from almost any other substance. Kent police are particularly anxious about that movement.

Mr. Illsley: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's concern and shall refer later to a slightly amusing incident that he will appreciate in which smugglers from my area went to his.

Smuggling is affecting Government policy and revenues. It also hits retailers in my constituency. I fully support initiatives to reduce smoking taken by this Government and their predecessor, and I support plans to

[Mr. Illsley]

ban tobacco advertising. I do not advocate reducing duty on cigarettes, but more resources should be given to Customs and Excise—and perhaps to Kent police—to try to stop tobacco being smuggled into the UK.

We must try to remove the reasons for wanting to smuggle tobacco. As the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) said, it is one of the easiest ways to make a lot of money these days. The Government could consider moving our duty rates closer to those of our continental counterparts more quickly than is envisaged. They could, in short, try to make smuggling less economic.

I welcome the freezing of duty on alcohol, except for cider. The difference between our levels of duty and those in Europe is substantial. Ours are much higher. The duty on a pint of beer, for example, is around 33p, but in France it is about 5p. Some of our European partners have cut their duties towards a target of 8p a pint, and it is easy to see how far we are from that rate. Even if we freeze alcohol duties for a few years, it will take some considerable time before European duties approximate to ours.

About one and a half million pints of beer enter the UK each year on which duty has been paid in France. That has a huge effect on domestic beer sales, just as tobacco smuggling affects tobacco retailing. Breweries have closed over the past few years and consumption of beer in pubs has decreased. The Treasury is losing an estimated £800 million a year as a consequence of alcohol smuggling.

There is a knock-on effect for my constituency, which is one of western Europe's largest producers of glass, by volume. We produce glasses and beer bottles, among other things, and the industry is feeling the pinch.

The hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent mentioned families descending on Kent with the sole intention of smuggling illegal quantities of beer and tobacco. More than 12 months ago, Channel 4's "Dispatches" programme focused on several people from my constituency who had been convicted of smuggling. They had travelled from South Yorkshire to Kent, lived there and gone across the channel with vans to come back with as much alcohol and tobacco as they could carry. They were unemployed, some of them ex-miners. They had no income, and they spotted a way to earn some easy money.

Those people were caught and convicted, but they were detected not by Customs and Excise but by the good people of Kent, who became fed up with lads from Barnsley having a good time and spending money that they had not previously had. The lads stood out a bit in the hostelries of Kent, speaking in good old-fashioned Barnsley accents and spending lots of money, as generous Barnsley people do. The people of Dover reported that an unusual group was camped in that part of Kent; it was not customs who caught them. The Budget announced extra funds for tackling smuggling, but we must try to reduce the differences in duty between ourselves and mainland Europe to remove the reason behind smuggling.

It is often suggested that many smugglers emanate from Sheffield. However, Sheffield is a vehicle registration area. A lot of vans and trucks that are clocked crossing the channel from ferry ports happen to be registered in Sheffield, but they are not always driven by people from Sheffield or South Yorkshire.

The more topical issues of the fuel duty escalator and the perceived effect on the haulage industry of vehicle excise duty on commercial vehicles have already been raised tonight. Like other Members, I have been heavily lobbied by the haulage industry and by local hauliers. In January, *Truck*, *Headlight* and other trade magazines ran similar articles calling on hauliers to lobby MPs and drawing attention to VED and the fuel duty escalator. They all carried stories about the possibility of Eddie Stobart moving abroad to take advantage of cheaper VED and cheaper diesel.

The Government are aware of that lobby and have acted to try to reduce the burden on small companies. The 1 per cent. reduction in corporation tax, the 1 per cent. reduction in small companies tax, the quarterly payments of advance corporation tax and the extension of capital allowances have all been cited as Government action that will ease the burden on hauliers. However, as the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said, companies must be making profits if they are to take advantage of reductions in corporation tax and so on, and must not have costs imposed on them.

A small company with few staff will not receive the advantages of the national insurance initiative that the Government have rightly taken. The smaller the profit, the less benefit there will be from reduced taxes. Our fuel is the most expensive in Europe, and vehicle excise duties for 30-tonne or 32-tonne lorries are, at about £3,200, the most expensive in Europe, too.

We have been through the environmental arguments for imposition of the fuel duty escalator. However, having an 1100 cc engine does not necessarily make a car cleaner than a 3.5 litre, superbly tuned, brand new car with catalytic converter. The smaller motor could easily be twice as dirty as the car with the larger engine. To take advantage of the £1,000 reduction in vehicle excise duty for cleaner engines would mean a hell of an investment to hauliers with few lorries.

The Government should consider the state of research. My research showed that the most recent work on European Union comparisons in respect of the costs of the road haulage industry is quite old. Both the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association estimate that 8,000 jobs will be lost over the next 12 months. One takes that with a pinch of salt, because they will try to make the best case that they can in respect of the escalator. There has been considerable press coverage and direct action by the hauliers. I condemn such action, which does the industry no good.

I appreciate what the Government have done in freezing VED for most commercial vehicles, but we must consider doing research to compare the situation with that in Europe. The Minister of Transport has mentioned a study—I think it was by KPMG—of comparative costs, but that was predicated on a 50-vehicle fleet. Many hauliers have fewer wagons. There are self-employed people who own one lorry and are contracted to other haulage companies. They cannot can take advantage of the things that I have mentioned and are not considered by the KPMG report. Some such operators are small family businesses, which are finding it difficult to cope.

Some 30 per cent. of lorry journeys are made by empty wagons. Too many lorries deliver fresh air because of our packaging systems, which mean that we cannot make optimal use of containers. We could improve fuel efficiency and route planning to take advantage of joint initiatives where one company contracts with another to bring loads back rather than bringing the lorry back empty.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Can the hon. Gentleman say which countries are doing that so much better than we are?

Mr. Illsley: I cannot. Our industry, and, I think, the Government, would maintain that we have a very efficient haulage industry. No matter how good the industry, packing a 32-tonne lorry with food, carpets or whatever, still means that a lot of space and fresh air is carried. Some issues cannot be addressed without research and development in the areas of packaging and freight haulage. We need up-to-date research to find out whether the arguments of the haulage industry are correct and whether it is true that it is disadvantaged vis-a-vis our European partners.

I welcome the Finance Bill and the Budget. I hope that the Government will consider the matters that I have raised in more detail in Committee.

7.33 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), if only because I intend to address many of the issues that he raised from the point of view of Northern Ireland. As he will discover, if things are bad with him, they are a great deal worse with us.

It would be interesting first to consider the debate so far and cast our minds back to the things that used to exercise us when there was much talk about the public sector borrowing requirement and how it could be reduced. The Government, and the previous Government, are to be congratulated in that we have sometimes got to the stage of repaying public sector debt, which I strongly favour. I hope that the Chancellor will keep it firmly in the forefront of his mind, because the saving in interest alone that would result from getting rid of the huge burden of Government debt is a fair prospect that he should try to realise. We pay out far too much money servicing public sector debt, which is often much the priciest way of securing investment. In addition, much borrowing is spent not on investment but on current expenditure, which means that we get no return for the public sector debt. I favour reducing it to nil if it can be managed.

The estimation of the tax demand that the tax-paying public will bear, however grudgingly, has exercised the brains of every ruler and Chancellor since taxation began. Get it wrong, and there will be resistance. At its most benign, that means tax fraud and avoidance. The next level up is smuggling. Formerly, the next level was rebellion and violence; now, it means moving overseas or across borders, as happens in Northern Ireland, to a lower tax regime.

I note from the CARE—Christian Action, Research and Education—brief sent to Members that in his 1997 Budget speech the Chancellor said:

"The tax system sends critical signals about . . . activities that a society wishes to promote and deter."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 311.]

I hope that he has not forgotten that, but keeps it firmly stuck to the front of his desk when he considers future Budget proposals. It might be better to replace "society" with "Government", but the principle is correct.

The statement illustrates an objective of taxation that is often ignored: the desire of the Government to achieve aims other than the mere raising of revenue. In a world where travel was slow and difficult and economies were isolated, it was relatively easy to ring-fence an economy. There was always some leakage, but in today's world, and especially in a borderless Europe, the leaks have turned into a raging torrent driven by widely different tax rates. Some of our rates have been set for laudable reasons besides raising revenue; but, in pursuit of those objectives, the balance has gone far beyond the willingness of the targeted population. The unwillingness to pay is rooted in the resentment felt by citizens when they compare like with like in other economies and countries.

Some years ago, the previous Government was well warned of the consequences of increasing tax on tobacco. I mentioned it several times. As long ago as 1994, in relation to tobacco, I said:

"we simply cannot go on allowing important sectors of the economy to be undermined or destroyed because we are so out of step with other countries"—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 854.]

That was echoed by the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central. We have now arrived at that point. The tobacco situation has developed exactly as the management and trade union representatives at the Gallaher's factory in Ballymena forecast. Every year they visit the House to meet Members not only from Northern Ireland but from elsewhere in the Kingdom. They will confirm, if confirmation is needed by Treasury Ministers, that those forecasts were made. They have now been borne out.

The smuggling of tobacco in its various forms is swelling from a trickle to a flood because of the vast difference in tax rates between United Kingdom and continental Europe. Those interested in what we were told by Gallaher's workers and management have only to look up my previous speeches. I will not weary the House with all that now, but it is clear that they were correct. Seventy per cent. of hand-rolling tobacco sold in this country is stuff that was exported mainly from Gallaher's. It is back here in a fortnight—smuggled in. The loss to the Revenue is immense. Gallaher's forecast that, if taxation on cigarettes went up, the same thing would happen, and it duly did. That is why I believe that we went far beyond what was fair and reasonable or what people were prepared to pay.

The benefits to the health of the nation from increased taxation on tobacco have not been realised. The tobacco industry is being wrecked and revenue is being lost. As I said in the Budget debate, the Red Book forecasts that the tobacco industry will decline in the next few years because the tax on tobacco has gone beyond what any citizen will willingly pay. Criminal activities have taken over, the revenue stream has been wrecked, and there is no benefit to the country. People are still smoking.

[Mr. William Ross]

We have used the stick to stop people smoking, but it is not working because people are now avoiding it. It is time to get back to the carrot, and the carrot has to be rooted in education, starting with the very young.

If the desired end of the tobacco tax regime was health rather than revenue, the desired end of the road fuel and vehicle excise duty regimes was environmental rather than revenue-inspired. We all know, of course, that both revenue and environmental considerations brought the road fuel escalator into being. At least that is what we have been told by both the present and previous Administrations.

The explosion of anger and frustration witnessed in Great Britain on the streets of this city and others since the Budget is clear proof that road taxes have passed beyond what most people affected by them believe to be reasonable, fair or equitable compared with those in other countries. I raised that matter in a debate as long ago as 15 December 1994. I pointed out the effect of the cost of fuel on every item that we purchased and the need for urban and suburban, comprehensive, high-frequency, cheap public transport to replace private cars in cities if there was to be any real environmental benefit.

I also drew attention to the consequences of high road fuel taxes for the rural dweller, for whom a car is not an option but an essential. The previous Government, and now the present Chancellor, have continued on the same line of action and have increased road fuel taxes, with the inevitable and foreseeable consequences. So there is no excuse for being where we are today. It should not have happened. People should have known enough to put the brakes on tax increases long since.

I understand that there is to be a debate on fuel taxation and the road haulage industry in the House tomorrow. I personally regret that it is to be held before the report on the effects of the policy in Northern Ireland has been made available. The Northern Ireland Select Committee has done such a report. I fear that it will not be published before tomorrow, but I understand that damning evidence was given as to the effects of the policy in Northern Ireland. I shall content myself by saying that it now seems that the figure that I gave to the House in March of £100 million of lost revenue in Northern Ireland alone in the past year appears to be wide of the mark. That figure is only a fraction of the true cost, which was anything up to £400 million last year. That is the cost of fuel smuggling between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland.

Any hon. Member besides me who had the opportunity of watching the television news in Belfast just after the Budget would have seen one lorry driver interviewed. I think that he was the owner of one truck, who did most or probably all of his work in Ireland. He told the television crew and the people of Northern Ireland that he did not buy any fuel in Northern Ireland. He bought it all in the Republic, saving £2,200 a month—£550 a week. I suppose that most people would be happy with that as profit, never mind extra profit. But perhaps the driver was not making any profit. He was not the only person buying all his fuel in the Irish Republic.

Many operators are now transferring their fleets to the Republic to take advantage not only of the cheap fuel there, but of the lower vehicle excise duty. I hope that whoever is in the Chair tomorrow will call some of my hon. Friends who are members of the Select Committee. They will be able to give other illustrations of the activities of the smugglers, many of whom in the border areas appear to be tied to the most violent and ruthless of the terrorist organisations. They will be able to describe the role of those organisations in fuel smuggling, the amount of money that they make, the amount of fuel shifted and the damage that is being done to all legitimate businesses in the border towns of Northern Ireland. The damage is colossal, and there is no point in saying, "We are doing our best." The best that has been done so far is not nearly good enough. A system of smuggling of outrageous criminality exists and it has to be defeated.

One story that the Select Committee was told was of a character who had got himself a stock lorry. He built a large tank inside it, stuffed all the ventilation holes with sheep's fleeces, put a dozen old ewes into the back bit, filled up the tank with fuel and drove backwards and forwards across the border all day until the Revenue caught him. Whenever officers glanced into the ventilation holes, they saw a few sheep blatting in the back end of the lorry. They did not realise that there were thousands of gallons of smuggled fuel in the front half of the vehicle.

Smugglers are an ingenious and ruthless lot. They have cost the Treasury an enormous sum of money. The damage that they are doing to the haulage industry in Northern Ireland is beyond comprehension. That has to be dealt with in Northern Ireland and the rest of Great Britain, especially in the light of what the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) said.

Hon. Members will recall that in Question Time last week the Minister of Transport gave the impression that accurate figures were available in respect of the costs for the road haulage industry in each EU country. I tabled written questions asking for those costs, which were due to be answered on Friday. The reply to the five or six questions that I tabled was that the Minister would answer me shortly. I hope that he will. I had hoped that the answers would be available today; they are not. That will surprise the House, because the Minister suggested that the information was sitting there and we had only to ask for it. Perhaps the details that I have asked for are so comprehensive that it has taken some time to assemble them. Let us hope that they are available tomorrow. I hope that they will give us a clear picture.

If the figures show that the costs in the United Kingdom as compared with those in EU countries are as the Government allege, hauliers will recognise that it is in their financial interest to stay within the United Kingdom. Given some of their reactions to the new tax rates in the past few weeks, I think that hauliers will take some convincing. We shall wait and see. It is sufficient for today's proceedings to say that the situation is intolerable and it has to be resolved.

I am glad to see that the provisions of the Bill in relation to road fuel will be considered on the Floor of the House. I look forward to those debates, but I regret that we are not taking on the Floor of the House the provisions relating to vehicle excise duty.

My final point is on an unrelated matter. Do the Government really believe in marriage? Will the tax system send out a clear signal that the Government want

marriage to be the foundation of a stable society in this country? If so, will the Government take steps to make it financially prudent to become and stay wed?

7.50 pm

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, South): Budget 1999 takes a major step towards building a stronger economic future for Britain and I warmly welcome the Finance Bill that takes it forward. The Bill adds to the two previous Finance Bills of the new Labour Government and, in many ways, will be seen as the most radical of the three. With 129 clauses and 20 schedules in 169 pages, it is certainly shorter than the two previous Finance Bills, but is none the worse for that—although it continues to surprise me that there are no fewer than eight schedules covering various aspects of stamp duty. However, there is a great deal of meat on the Bill and I am sure that all those who discuss it in Standing Committee will find that there is plenty of work to do.

I have served on every Finance Bill Standing Committee since I was elected to the House in December 1994, so I am becoming something of a connoisseur. Although 1995 and 1996 were good vintages for Bordeaux and Burgundy, they were very poor indeed for Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol and the rest of Britain. That meant that, when the new Labour Government took office in May 1997, we inherited an extremely fragile economy, a national debt that had doubled and public finances that were in a terrible state.

Our first two Budgets laid down a sound macro-economic framework for the United Kingdom and this Budget builds on that. The Budget is finely balanced. The overall fiscal stance of all three Budgets has clearly benefited the British economy, and will put us in a position that ensures that, in the next century, British companies will have the ability to succeed in Europe and our European home market.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The hon. Gentleman tells us that the situation that his Government inherited at the election was unsound. We could argue about that for a long time, but will he tell us whether he believes that the situation was better or worse than that which the Conservatives inherited in 1979?

Mr. Pearson: I have no desire to spend Second Reading giving the hon. Gentleman a history lesson, but, if he wants to pursue that matter outside the Chamber, I shall be happy to engage in debate with him.

It is clear that the Budget and the Finance Bill will make work pay and help to build a fairer society. I particularly welcome the 10p starting rate for income tax: that will benefit many hundreds of thousands of people throughout Britain. It sends an important signal as to the Labour Government's views on personal taxation. I also welcome other measures, such as the national insurance reforms that have taken place. They will relieve almost a million people from paying tax at all. The minimum income guarantee means that families with one wage earner will be able to earn slightly more than £10,000 before they have to pay tax. A package of reforms totalling £1 billion will benefit pensioners. We should also welcome the increases in child benefit that were announced in the Budget.

I want to devote most of my speech to the effects of the Budget on business. The first point to acknowledge is that the 10 per cent. starting rate of corporation tax is widely welcomed by small businesses. The research and development tax credit is also welcomed by small and medium-sized businesses. The Opposition have lost the plot when it comes to issues such as the R and D tax credit. Britain's future clearly lies in building a knowledge-driven economy. Research and development encouraging innovation and the development of value-added products and services must be the future for the British nation. It is essential that we have an R and D tax credit and I am sure that it will be used by businesses.

The extension of the scheme for employee share ownership is welcome; a vast body of evidence suggests that that is an extremely sensible measure that will help to improve company performance. Likewise, the 40 per cent. capital allowances regime will be significant in helping to encourage investment and growth—I shall say more about that later.

Finally, in respect of measures that are welcomed by businesses, there is the announcement of the establishment of the small business service. For too long, small businesses have received short shrift from Governments of whatever political persuasion. Now, the small business service has the potential to do something radical and to ensure that the voice of small business is heard at the heart of Government. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and her colleagues on the Treasury Bench are keen that that should happen, and I hope that we follow through on that matter so that we develop a powerful body with the same clout as the Small Business Administration in the United States.

As other Members want to contribute to the debate, I shall be brief. I want to focus on three matters: road fuel duty; the climate change levy; and the capital allowances regime. In relation to road fuel duty, I have no time for the opportunism of the Tories. The Conservative Government introduced the road fuel duty escalator and it is a bit rich for the Conservatives to say that they have changed their minds on that issue now, late in the day. The road hauliers, too, have not been especially well served by having as their chief spokesman a former Tory Minister with ambitions to be the mayor of London.

Countless local road hauliers have talked to me about the road fuel duty. I have seen their balance sheets, profit and loss accounts, cash-flow forecasts, management accounts and order books, and I know that many of them have real problems. The problems are not confined to road hauliers; large swathes of manufacturing industry are beginning to be hit by the tax. As no other Government in Europe are following the road that we are going down, and as the pace of technological change is such that new developments in clean fuel technology and alternative propulsion systems mean that year by year our cars are becoming cleaner, we need to reconsider the road fuel duty escalator. We have reached the stage—we may even have gone past it—when it is time to take our foot off the gas and to say that the road fuel duty has now achieved what we could have reasonably expected for it without damaging the competitiveness of British industry. Common sense says that we must take our foot off the escalator at some time; I should like to think that, after this year, we shall decide to discontinue the road fuel duty escalator policy—perhaps that is an early Budget 2000

[Mr. Pearson]

representation. I should welcome any review or detailed proposals that the Government might want to make on that matter.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I applaud the courage of the hon. Gentleman in standing up to the pressure from his colleagues on the Treasury Bench on that matter. However, if he accepts that it is right to call a halt to the escalator, why does he criticise the Conservatives for saying that we should call a halt before the Finance Bill is passed and not afterwards? Surely, we are on the same side: it is only a question of when we call a halt. The road hauliers in his constituency are telling him that we should call a halt before this latest increase, not after it.

Mr. Pearson: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are not on the same side. The Conservatives' opportunism beggars belief: they have wound up hauliers and they have given tacit support to some of the recent demonstrations, which I condemn. However, the issue will not go away. The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) was right to say that the problem is especially acute in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) also made some sensible points in respect of the road fuel duty escalator.

On the question of technological progress, every major automotive manufacturer is currently spending a lot of money on research into battery-operated vehicles and fuel cells. Daimler-Chrysler has already announced that, in 2004, it is to start production of a fuel cell-powered car, and Toyota, Ford and GM are all following suit. The technology already exists and the costs are being driven down, if not by the minute, then by the day. If we were able to fast-forward to 2010 and look back on the period between now and then, we might feel rather silly at having taken action that damaged British competitiveness when cleaner, more fuel-efficient cars were coming along to remove the problem. If we do not have a European solution to the problem, we do not have any solution at all.

The climate change levy will not be introduced until 2001, and consultation will be carried out in respect of the proposals, which is welcome. I remain concerned that the primary impact will be on manufacturing industry, so we must take care during the consultation phase to do all that we can to ensure that extra burdens are not imposed on manufacturing. I am sure that the Government will come up with an exemption scheme for high-energy users, but I should like to highlight the glass industry, which is important to my constituency.

Glass manufacturers operate in an extremely competitive environment and they are significant energy users. The industry uses fairly large pieces of capital equipment, so changing to investing in more efficient technology in anything less than the medium term would create insuperable business burdens and threaten the future of large sections of the industry. I raise those issues as part of my early representations and hope that they will be considered during the consultation process.

The 40 per cent. capital allowances regime is extremely welcome—perhaps in the next Budget, the Government will announce that it is to be a permanent feature of their policy. The specific matter which I want to highlight is leasing, which is currently excluded from the proposals for the capital allowances regime. I have no qualms about saying that some of the scams that went on in finance leasing occupied a lot of our time, as we tried to do something about them in previous Finance Bills. No one wants the tax base to be eroded by purely artificial schemes, but let us consider leasing in connection with information technology.

The current tax system has the potential to distort investment decisions, because, if a company has the money or the financial security to borrow the money to do so, the existing regime provides an incentive for it to buy, or to take out a loan to buy, capital equipment such as IT equipment. Most sensible companies consider leasing as a means of purchasing IT equipment, but the companies are unable to benefit from leasing arrangements under the current regime. That is wrong, because leasing computer equipment is a sensible option that gives small businesses the opportunity to upgrade their equipment, which is not possible if they buy the equipment. As a Government, we should not in effect be encouraging companies to buy IT equipment when leasing deals would be far more efficient.

I know that, because the benefits of the capital allowances would go to the leasing companies, it is not a simple matter to bring leasing under the capital allowances regime in a way that would help small and medium-sized businesses. However, it is not beyond the intelligence of Treasury officials to develop arrangements whereby the benefits of those capital allowances could be passported through to the small and medium-sized businesses. If we did that, we would have an improved capital allowances regime. I already think that it is good, but if the regime could include a sensible leasing package, it would be better.

This year's Finance Bill represents a tremendous step forward in building a stronger modern economy in Britain. It has been welcomed by people in my constituency and by the vast majority of businesses. A recent study by Manchester university reported that small businesses will be 5.7 per cent. better off as a result of the Budget; that is a testament to the Government's commitment to small businesses in this country. I warmly welcome the Bill.

8.7 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am grateful to have been called to speak in the debate. I suspect that this is the first time that I have spoken in a debate on a Finance Bill. When I came into the Chamber, I thought that I had little to say but, the more I read of the Bill, the more issues I find on which I want to comment seriously.

I am pleased that some Labour Members are starting break away from their Trappist tendencies, or from the sycophancy whereby they say nothing bad. The one issue that appears to unite hon. Members on both sides—even though some would deny it—is the fuel duty escalator. When a Conservative Chancellor introduced the escalator, he did not do so without taking a good deal of criticism from Conservative Members. Therefore, although I doubt that I shall be a member of the Standing Committee on the Bill, I am sure that, if the hon. Members for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) are on that Committee and they get together with the Opposition, we shall be able to table an amendment that will be passed with support from both sides of the Committee. I should not make such suggestions while the Whips are listening.

It was with the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House that the previous Conservative Administration moved toward having a unified Budget, so I am concerned that, although the Government have carried out their comprehensive spending review and decided what is to be spent over the next three years, this Budget has again split the two processes of taxation and spending. However good their crystal ball, I cannot believe that any Government can state their spending totals for the next three years and be absolutely certain of achieving them.

The Government can set targets and try to achieve them, but unexpected issues always arise—for example, Kosovo will have increased defence costs and aid spending. There is considerable pressure to be far more generous in paying nurses and teachers, but proper analysis of the increased funding for the national health service and education shows that that pay pressure will continue, because the money is not there even to pay what has already been promised to those two groups of people.

It is a tradition in such debates to say something positive. I must declare an interest as I am an adviser to the Telecommunication Managers Association, and I welcome without reservation the removal of the tax on mobile phones. The tax was introduced by a Conservative Chancellor who thought that he made a rather good joke about being disturbed in restaurants by mobile phones. That joke was not appreciated by anybody in business. It was completely wrong to tax an individual because he owned a mobile phone and could be contacted by his employer at any time of the day or night. Many mobile phones are now equipped with vibrators and messages appear on the screen to identify the caller. One may be contacted by telephone even in the Chamber. I am surprised that no one has decided to tax pagers, but I am grateful that that decision has not been taken.

Unfortunately, I have no more praise for the Bill. Many clauses of Finance Bills have gone down in infamy, and clause 31, which abolishes the right of widows to receive bereavement allowance, might be the infamous clause in this case. That is one of the very few benefits—probably the only one—that a married woman receives when her husband dies prematurely. At present, it is a non-means-tested benefit that is paid for by national insurance contributions—I understand that the size of those contributions may decrease, but that does not matter to individuals who are now in their 50s and who have paid contributions all their working lives so that, if they die, their wives may benefit.

No matter what their level of income, it is always more expensive for people to carry on alone. Many women who have chosen to be home makers will be forced back into work and perhaps into low-paid jobs because they lack workplace skills. Perhaps even more serious is the plight of the woman who is in work when her husband dies. Under the non-means-tested benefit system, that woman was able to stay in work because she also received the widows benefit. The removal of that allowance is most appalling. I asked the Prime Minister during Question Time whether he was proud to be the Labour Prime Minister who abolished the widows pension. He gave me a fair answer: he said that it was a matter of balance and that we must decide which direction to take. I think it is totally wrong for a Labour Government to introduce means testing of the widows pension.

Many Conservative Governments signalled their desire to abolish stamp duties and we had almost reached that point, but duties have now been cranked up again. It is a wholly wrong-headed tax. For example, someone who moves house every few years because of his job—perhaps he is in the armed forces—must pay a tax for occupying exactly the same size house as someone who remains in one place in the same dwelling. Stamp duty will hit people hard and hinder labour flexibility. It is a particularly strange imposition because this Budget is supposed to help people back into work.

I am particularly worried about economic policy. The Government claim constantly that they have a stable economic policy, but stability may be defined as zero growth. I do not think that Labour Ministers, even in their wildest dreams or nightmares, would aspire to zero growth. I think they want an economy that is growing at a steady rate, with no sudden moves up or down. That sounds wonderful: we would all love to see it. However, what has happened? We have moved from the ideal position of 3 per cent. growth to 1 per cent. growth or lower and a near-recessionary situation, yet the Government claim that they have achieved stability and moved away from Tory boom and bust. We may have a soft landing, but the economy that was growing so well has gone bust.

Hon. Members may argue about the way in which we share the cake, but, unless the economy is growing—hopefully at a steady rate, but perhaps by fits and starts—we will not be able to pay for additional services for our constituents. We might argue about the size of allocations to the health service or to defence, but, if the cake is not growing, we are fooling ourselves, because we cannot achieve anything. I do not see where that steady growth will come from in this Budget. It provides penny packet assistance for companies, but will not, for example, compensate for the massive increase in fuel duty, which will deflate the economy and retard growth.

The Government have produced all sorts of glossy brochures which do not say anything in an attempt to persuade people that they are either preparing the economy to join the euro or at least preparing to put the membership question to the people. Nothing in the Bill suggests how those outcomes will be achieved. What has happened to the euro since the Government's strategy began? I do not know whether the euro has devalued by 7 or 8 per cent. against the pound, but it has had enormous effects on the United Kingdom economy.

I do not blame the Labour Government: the European central bank must take much of the responsibility for that devaluation. After all, it suggested to the world that the euro would be a stable reserve currency. It is stable for the 11 countries in economic and monetary union, but it is certainly not stable for anyone else. At one point, there was a 1 per cent. devaluation every week. If that had continued for a year, the euro's value would have halved and it would have been worth as little as the rouble.

The Chancellor can no longer knock on the door of the Bank of England and say, "Excuse me, Governor, but I think that you have got interest rates wrong." However, unlike the 11 EMU member countries, the Chancellor can knock on the door of the president of the European central bank and tell him to do something about the euro. The devaluation of the euro will cause all sorts of problems for our economy, and therefore the Government's Budget. When we take off 0.25 per cent.,

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

euroland takes off 0.5 per cent. We must address that problem if this economy is to work and if the gross domestic product figures in the Budget are to be achieved. Everything depends on it; the Government must not be pushed off course.

A few months after losing office, former Chancellors will usually admit that Treasury forecasts are never right. One can bet one's shirt on it. That is understandable because the Treasury does not have a reliable forecasting mechanism: it has only a crystal ball.

I shall deal now with one of the main issues in the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), who has had much experience in trying to achieve simplification of tax, referred earlier to the previous Government's attempts at that and said that all hon. Members, including Labour Members, had signed up to that aim. We are moving towards increased complexity, which is not what we want. I used to work out wages for the companies that I worked for, and I know how much time and effort go into that task when there are multiple tax rates. Having a single tax rate for the vast majority of people and raising the upper tax rate out of the reach of many people were good moves.

The previous Conservative Government set themselves a target. They could not reduce the basic tax rate to 20p overnight, so they said—their proposal was complex, but it was at least a development—that they would introduce a lower rate of 20p and try gradually to bring down the standard rate to 20p. This Government have said, "We shall have a 10p rate because we promised one and it sounded really good." That is paid for by abolishing the 20p rate, but is anybody suggesting that the standard 23p rate of income tax will, over the next five or 10 years, go down to 10p? Layers are being introduced to the income rate structure which will become permanent.

People jump up and down with joy and say that lower tax rates will benefit the low-paid, but those rates will be the accountants' delight because they allow people to move income around. I have always wanted national insurance rates to be close to tax rates, and I welcome the move towards that, but I caution the Government that many households can move income around, and they will start to do so.

It has always been advantageous for a man who is in business for himself and whose wife is a home maker and looks after the children to say that she does the books or answers the phone once in a while, so that he can pay her up to the national insurance minimum. That practice is widespread, and I am not giving away any secrets. By increasing the national insurance limit, the Government have introduced a greater incentive for wealthy people who run their own limited company to indulge in that practice. Treasury Ministers say that they want to close loopholes, but they might well find that they have just widened a loophole, and that will create difficulties for them.

Some people might say that the introduction of the working families tax credit is a generous move. There is certainly a case for saying to individuals who are at home, "We shall give you an incentive to get back to work." That proposal is more complicated than previous measures. If the Government wanted to give people more help through income support or other means, they could have done so more simply. In addition to dealing with all the different tax rates, employers must now work out the working families tax credit. It is a negative income tax, and this is the first time that we have had such a tax.

The Government will face problems with people fraudulently manipulating the working families tax credit. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition stated the case perfectly when he said that people would be able to look after other people's children and get paid for it. They will find devices so that they can say that they are working for somebody else, and income will be going backwards and forwards, but the Government will be topping up that money.

I do not know how many hours people will have to work before they will be entitled to the working families tax credit. That may well be in the detail of the Bill, but I suspect that it is not. I believe that the figure may be 30 hours.

Mr. Tyrie: It is 16 hours.

Mr. Bruce: In that case, the situation is a great deal worse than I thought, as we would realise if we divided the guaranteed minimum income of £200 a week by 16, which would give an awfully high hourly rate. That provides an incentive for people to get jobs paid at £3.60 an hour or, if they are under 22, £3 an hour, and claim the rest of their income from the tax system. We can imagine the scams that people could set up because we know of the present scams in social security fraud, such as people having multiple identities.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he and his party are committed to repealing the working families tax credit? How would he explain that to the families who stand to gain by about £23 extra a week?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Lady must be a little careful. We expect the Labour party to be in government for at least another year, probably two. That will give us the opportunity to find out how the working families tax credit works and whether it is better than income support and the other systems that we have had. We have always attempted to ensure that people are able to go back to work, and hon. Members are united in their desire to remove poverty traps from which people cannot escape.

I shall make a prediction to the hon. Lady. People in the Treasury, even under a Labour Government, are not stupid, and I suspect that the problems that I have warned the Government of will come back to haunt them. It may well be a Labour Government, rather than a Conservative Government, who will abolish the working families tax credit. We must remember that the Labour Government have just abolished student grants. Who could ever have predicted that? In the Bill, they are abolishing the widow's mite and means-testing widows' pensions, for which their husbands paid. I do not exonerate the Government from any of their actions. They will find out how the working families tax credit works, and I suspect that an awful lot of rules and regulations will be introduced to try to prevent it from being abused.

I decided that my speech would be about the utilities tax. There are a small number of measures in the Bill relating to the new deal. To keep in order, as the new deal

was in the previous Finance Bill, and is already in place, I ask the Government to consider seriously how the new deal is working. When a Government raise £5 billion by taxing the utilities and then announce a new deal, it would be a strange beast who would not try to make the best of the new deal figures. However, I started examining the new deal figures in my constituency. I meet regularly with the staff of the jobcentre in my area, with whom I have a very good working relationship. I was the only Member of Parliament in my area who turned up at a meeting to launch the new deal for the region—I wanted the new deal to work and be effective.

The Government's aim—to target the long-term unemployed—was a good one. Under the previous Government, long-term unemployment was coming down rapidly. It also declined under the first year of the Labour Government, before the new deal was introduced. Whenever one challenges the Government about the new deal figures, they repeatedly claim that they have slashed long-term unemployment among 18 to 24-year-olds. That was true until the new deal was introduced.

The new deal is due to cost £5.2 billion over four years. After three months of the new deal, it looked as though about 9,000 people had been put back to work. That figure refers to people coming off the long-term unemployment register—never mind the complex figures that the new deal people provide. After six months—the period for which the new deal was meant to help people—the number had gone back up by 9,000 or 10,000. After nine months, the number had gone up by another 22,000. The figures that are cited—I am sure that every hon. Member receives such a figure every month, showing how many people have "found a job" under the new deal—are the churn that always existed: if long-term unemployed people find a job, they come off the long-term unemployment register; and others who might have been unemployed for rather a long time go on the register.

What is interesting is that, in the three or four years before the previous Government lost power, and for the year that the present Government continued our policies, the number of the long-term unemployed was falling rapidly. Indeed, the number of the unemployed in general was going down rapidly. We have to be careful with the statistics. If someone signs off from long-term unemployment, does a week's bar work and then signs on again, he is on ordinary unemployment as he has a fresh claim. In other words, there may be long-term unemployed people who are never included in the six-month unemployment figure.

The Government are spending £5.2 billion on the new deal, but the one group of people that has had the "advantage" of the new deal for virtually a year is the group that is growing faster than any other. I asked the Prime Minister a question about this after six months. One group—the long-term unemployed—had increased by 43 per cent. over a quarter, which is absolutely unbelievable. One could say that the statistics are wrong, but I tried to investigate what was really happening, as I could not understand how the group of people that we were trying to help could grow in number.

It seems that the Employment Service is concentrating all its efforts and resources—its resources have been cut by this Government—on people who have been unemployed for six months. Perhaps who have not been unemployed for six months are left on their own. Also, more might be coming up to being unemployed for six months because less effort is being made to help them in that time. Effort is being made, not to find people subsidised jobs but to send them on a training course, a do-gooding course or a make-work course. There are people in every constituency who have signed contracts with the Department for Education and Employment to provide such schemes. These people are great advocates for the schemes. I am sure that they are very good, but they are not bringing people back into work.

Mr. Gardiner: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that young people's capacity to achieve skills, at least at general national vocational qualification, level 2, is vital for their long-term employment prospects? Will he take on board the very real need to make sure that young people in the labour pool have those skills if they are to get jobs that they will retain in the long term? He was rather dismissive of the need to establish a skills base.

Mr. Bruce: I follow the hon. Gentleman's argument. When the new deal was first suggested, I would have agreed that, by providing those skills, we would improve people's employability. We might have wonderful ideas in this place about what might happen if only we gave people additional skills, but I am reporting what has actually happened. Unfortunately, what the hon. Gentleman suggests has not happened.

Unless one finds a job for someone in the first place, it is like bringing an unemployed person and employee together and saying to the employer, "I know you don't want to take on this individual now, but, if I promise to give him a six-month course to do this, that and the other, will you promise to give him at least a chance of employment?" I am afraid that schemes set up by every Government have had that feature. A group of people goes off into education and, although the educational establishment does its best, the scheme never achieves what it was intended to achieve.

The Government admit that the original plan was that about 40 per cent.—perhaps 50 per cent.—of people entering a new deal scheme would enter subsidised employment. However, the subsidised employment is almost non-existent. In my constituency, supposedly, only 10 people have gone into a new deal subsidised employment option.

I was heavily criticised by Labour councillors in my constituency, whose message is, "These damn Tories do not care about the long-term unemployed," so I telephoned the local authority and asked, "How many people do you have working from the new deal?" The reply was, "We have not discussed it with those responsible." I have persuaded the council to get together with the jobcentre.

I want the council to take people on. I want the £5 billion to be sensibly spent. I am simply telling the Minister that the fiddly little things that the Government are trying to do in the Bill are not enough. We need to take a fundamental look at what is happening, because the money is running out and is not doing what we intended it to do.

[Mr. Bruce]

On page 54, in box 4.1, although the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" says:

"The New Deal for 18-24s has already secured 58,000 jobs for young people. Among them are".

that is untrue. The new deal did none of that. It has actually slowed down what was happening without the new deal. It has been a failure. Before the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) shakes his head, let me say that, tomorrow, we get the first year's full figures in relation to long-term unemployment, and I suspect that they will cause great concern.

I suggest that the hon. Member for Brent, North and other Labour Members table questions to the Minister to find out what has happened in their constituencies. It is not enough to know the flow of people through the new deal scheme, because masses of people are moving from the gateway on to a scheme and so on, but they are falling off the other end and going nowhere. More people are disappearing off the books to who-knows-where than are being helped. We must find out what is happening.

I shall now discuss ISAs and PEPs. We should remember why the previous Government introduced tax-free savings schemes. At the time, a person might save long term for a pension by entering a pension scheme with all the tax benefits, allowing someone else to manage that money, but managing one's own money to a certain extent and putting an amount away for retirement was not allowed.

Appallingly, when the Labour Government decided to introduce ISAs, they intended to tell people with PEPs to cash them in. I am glad that, as a result of protests by the Conservatives, by the industry and by the people who held PEPs for their long-term retirement benefit—which would ensure that the state would not have to keep people—the Government very quickly abandoned that intention.

Now that the Government have introduced ISAs, a simple piece of arithmetic may explain why ISAs will not be right for people, even as a short-term savings method. At the moment, individuals receive only about 3 per cent. interest. When financial institutions tell the investor, "We shall charge you 1 per cent. to manage your money and then you can have a tax-free allowance," that 1 per cent. is, in effect, the 33.3 per cent. tax; so, although one may save 10, 23 or even 40 per cent. tax, one pays the guy—I am sorry, the person; the woman or the man—who sold the ISA more than one would pay the taxman. People must therefore consider the matter very carefully.

If we had interest rates of 15 per cent., and if one paid tax on that 15 per cent. and then paid someone 1 per cent. to manage the money, the individual would obviously do better. I did not mean to suggest that interest rates would reach 15 per cent. under the present Government. I cannot remember—was it 23 per cent. or 25 per cent. inflation that Labour got at one time?

If interest rates are very low, the management charges on a complicated product such as an ISA or a PEP may outweigh the benefits. The Conservative Government had problems after persuading people to take out personal pensions. I hate to think that, in a few years' time, the Chancellor may be pulled up and asked by individuals, "Please, will you pay back billions of pounds? We were persuaded to take our money out of the building society to put it into an ISA, and it is worth less than it would have been if we had left it in the building society."

The first PEP that my wife and I took out performed appallingly. The guys who were running it—they were guys in this instance, but I shall not name them because I think that others were in the same position—were getting their 2 or 3 per cent. for managing our funds, but the stock market was doing nowt and our PEP was doing even worse. Eventually things turned round and it is now a reasonable long-term investment. However, there has to be an element of return on which tax would be paid in the normal way to pay for the management of these funds.

I think that ISAs are being badly directed. The Government say, "But people can take the money in and out ever so easily." However, ISAs may become investments into which people transfer their building society savings or their ready-money account, when they should keep those savings where they are. We should be encouraging people to save so as to keep up the savings ratio, which is good for government. That should be done by encouraging people to enter into long-term savings that the Government are providing. That is an alternative to putting money away into a pension scheme.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: I will, indeed. The hon. Gentleman is very energetic.

Mr. Gardiner: Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that one of the most important ways of persuading poor people to save is to ensure that the funds that they put into a savings account are not locked up? The fact that they can withdraw their savings does not mean that they will, but the ability to do so acts as a great incentive for people with not much money to put it into a savings vehicle.

Mr. Bruce: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying. I am disappointed that he did not listen to my economic argument.

We already have the Giro bank, National Savings and many building societies, banks and other establishments that spend a fortune persuading people to invest with them on the basis that it will be easy to get their money out. In effect, some are saying, "I will even give you more money than you put in." Much is being done to encourage people to save. However, at the end of the day, if someone does not really have enough money on which to live, is scraping all the time and is trying to decide whether he can afford to buy a tin of baked beans or a tin of cat food at the end of the week, he will not save. That will be the position whatever we politicians say to encourage such people to save.

I accept that some people are regular savers. Some kids put half their pocket money away and accumulate. Other kids are always coming to mum by Wednesday, saying, "Can I have some more pocket money, because I have spent all that I was given?" People are like that. I remember that, whenever I gave one of my employees her pay slip—I used to pay my employees with cash—she would say, "That is for the mortgage, that is for my club, that is for this and that is for that, and I have £5 to last me till the end of the week." Some people spend in advance and other save.

I am not suggesting to the Government that they should not try to encourage people to save. I am saying that it is a good thing to encourage people who can put a good

deal of their money away every year because it is tax advantageous to do so. Such an approach should not be destroyed. I cannot see any logic in anything that acts against those investors in the vain hope that people who are poor will suddenly start saving lots of money. That defeats me.

Several Members have spoken about the fuel escalator. It may be known that I am the vice-chairman of the all-party motor group. The Automobile Association has spent much time and trouble analysing what happened over the years during which the Conservative party had a fuel escalator. I can assure the House that, in looking after a rural constituency, every time that fuel tax has increased, I have said, "I don't think that you should have done that, Chancellor." However, we know that Chancellors want to raise money. They also have the excuse that Rio has intervened.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Did the hon. Gentleman feel a slight pang of guilt when, in 1992, the Conservative party fought a fairly hefty campaign implying that a fuel escalator was a very bad thing? Was there not then a slight element of hypocrisy when the then Conservative Chancellor introduced it?

Mr. Bruce: I do not recall fighting the 1992 election and saying that there would not be a fuel price escalator. If the hon. Gentleman tells me that that was my manifesto, I shall defer to his greater knowledge.

On the carbon tax issue, if the Chancellor had said, "I shall not put VAT on fuel. I have read the Liberal Democrat manifesto. I have read the Labour party's policy papers. Although my Conservative colleagues tell me that it is a bad idea, I am persuaded that we should introduce a carbon tax at 17.5 per cent," who could have argued against that? It is presentation, presentation, presentation, is it not?

We had given certain undertakings that we would reduce carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere. We as a country should be proud, and I believe that the Government are proud when they go to environmental conferences and say, "We Brits have done what we said that we would do."

The tax on domestic fuel was highly unpopular. I am a realist and I was in favour of removing it as soon as possible. That was an unhappy experience for Conservatives. We decided to squeeze the motorist, and we raised a lot of money from that. We spent a considerable amount of it on new road building, but that programme has now been slashed. Much of the money that was raised from the escalator was spent on hospitals, schools and so on. If people are willing to pay a tax and it also has the effect of reducing carbon dioxide emissions, that could be a good thing.

When the Automobile Association carried out a survey of how much fuel was burned by our cars in the UK, the findings were amazing. Despite the fact that the economy had been booming and people had been buying cars and driving further in their cars, the amount of CO_2 being produced by those cars had gone down. People had got rid of their old gas guzzlers and bought more economic cars. We in the House have changed the way in which we pay our allowances so that it is more economic for hon. Members to take on smaller cars.

In the Bill, the Government have tried to avoid complicated ways of getting more fuel-efficient cars on the road. They have decided that any car under 1100 cc will be cheaper to run, and any car over 1100 cc will be more expensive. I have made the same comment on several occasions. My wife used to have a Vauxhall Nova that was just under 1100 cc. After seven or eight years, she changed the car to another Vauxhall Nova of the same size and shape, but with a 1.4 litre engine—a more modern engine—but she uses less fuel with that engine than with the previous one.

The data provided by the Government laboratories on buying a car and the different engine sizes show that it does not follow that a bigger engine in the same car uses more fuel—on the contrary. If one puts a diesel engine, which is the largest of all, in the car, it uses a good deal less fuel. In trying to achieve simplicity, the Government have missed the point. The escalator has done its job of persuading people to change to more fuel-efficient cars, but it is wrong to continue with the measure. If the Government decided to give a special boost to fuel cells and provide a subsidy that was not available to other types of car, that might do some good, but they are not tackling the problem in the right way.

With their measures relating to diesel in lorries, the Government have lost the plot entirely. If they make diesel so expensive that people will drive to the nearest port, cross the channel, fill up with diesel on the other side paying French taxes, drive back via the port and do a week's work on that diesel fuel to save money, or if they encourage drivers from eastern Europe with clapped-out old lorries to come over and do all the cabotage, they will increase the amount of fuel used. That strikes me as wholly logical.

When I was on a radio programme with a Labour MP recently, he boasted, "We are spending an extra £21 billion on the health service. You have never been able to match that." What is more, he claimed that our Treasury Front Bench team had said that the expenditure was too extravagant. I said, "I think that your smoke and mirrors were so efficient that they fooled even our Front-Bench team."

What does an extra £21 billion actually mean? Let me analyse it. Labour Members laugh. They must wonder why those who run schools in their constituencies telephone them to say that they have not received the £19 billion that was supposedly going to arrive.

Let us deal with the £21 billion, because that is an easier amount with which to deal. The period involved is three years. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde suggested a moment ago that £1 billion over three years meant a third of that amount in each of those years, but that is not the case. The £21 billion does not mean that, in each of the years involved, the Government will add £7 billion to the total, so that, at the end of the three years, an extra £21 billion will go to schools.

Let me explain the system. It is wonderful: it is like magic. I am sure that all hon. Members are very attentive. In fact, the Government will give an extra £3.5 billion—I believe that that is 0.2 per cent. more than the amount that we used to give in every one of our 18 years in office—to the health service in year one. In the next year, they will provide another £3.5 billion—a little over inflation, but there we are—and, in the year after that,

[Mr. Bruce]

they will provide a further £3.5 billion. That amounts to £10.5 billion. Where does the £21 billion figure come from?

To achieve that figure, it is necessary to add three figures together. First there is £3.5 billion, then there is £7 billion, then there is £10.5 billion—and that adds up to £21 billion. Those who want to know how much extra they will receive over a year according to new Labour arithmetic must cut the amount by half to start with—because we are talking about the extra amount that will be received in the third year—and then cut the final amount by a third to find the annual income.

Inflation, however, is knocking most of that out. Let us now return to the £19 billion figure. I know that hon. Members are attending carefully to what I am saying. That will give us a starting sum of £3½ billion. I mention that because I know that the *Hansard* reporters will have a job reporting it, because there is no one sixth on their word processors. The figure then becomes £6½ billion, and then £9½ billion.

Just in case anyone is running away with the thought that the House is providing £19 billion, let me say that it ain't. The Red Book tells us that those are the totals that are being provided, the stealth tax—the rise in council tax—being included. This is what the Budget actually means for education spending, and what will happen in the next three years. Over the coming year, £0.8 billion will be spent on education; during the following year, £1.3 billion will be spent, and in the year after that, it will be another £1 billion. That is what is being contributed from the central Exchequer. The rest of the money will come from the stealth tax—the council tax—and I hope that people will understand that on 6 May.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: I was about to sit down, but I shall give way.

Mr. Rogers: The hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that Labour Front Benchers are being deceitful, is he?

Mr. Bruce: I cannot add anything to what the hon. Gentleman has said, but I think that Labour Front Benchers are very, very clever. I would never tell my constituents that they are a deceitful, lying bunch, because I am much too parliamentary. I say that they are very clever. We have new Labour, new economics, new arithmetic: it just has to be explained to people.

8.54 pm

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): It has been interesting to listen to the speeches today. They have shown, first, that many Opposition Members do not have much of a handle on what is in the Bill—a good deal of the debate has concerned what is not in it—and, secondly, that they do not have much of a handle on what they want to happen to the tax system and the income of the general public.

Opposition Members have spent a lot of time criticising what they call tax increases. Some have said that they are stealth taxes; others have said that they have been discussed publicly and that everyone knows about them. There is a lack of clarity there.

A number of Opposition Members have criticised the different types of spending that we are proposing which are not in the Bill but were in the Budget that the Bill implements. To a great extent, this is familiar territory for Labour Members, because we have heard Conservative Members criticising taxes and public spending before. However, those criticisms do not square with the latest relaunch of the Conservative party, which I heard being discussed quite fulsomely by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), the deputy leader of the Conservative party.

The right hon. Gentleman said that the Conservative party now understands that the public are generally concerned about the national health service, education and spending on them, and that people want more provision—not from the private sector, but in the public sector. The money has to come from somewhere; if it is public sector money, it has to come through taxation.

The Bill represents a fair judgment about taxation and where taxes should come from that also equates with the amount of money that the Government propose to spend on services. We have got that balance right, which has put an end to the futile discussions that used to go on about by how much taxes should go up or down. The public think that we have raised taxes through fair means and we have spent money on the things that people want money to be spent on, which accounts for the Government's continued good standing with the public. Although some might say that their standing is surprisingly high for this point in a parliamentary term, many of us have found that our constituents give a general welcome to the Budget, which is a tribute to the Government.

In many ways, the Bill is the mirror image of Conservative Finance Bills of the mid and late 1980s, which were extremely radical and extremely bold. Those Bills said clearly what the Conservatives wanted to happen in society and shifted money sharply from ordinary people to the privileged few. This Bill is part of the long-term and continued restructuring of the economy and of our society, which will ensure that people see that work pays. The Bill supports families and, more important, children. It also supports pensioners and small businesses. Conservative Members have talked about growth. The Bill will provide sustainable growth, which provides security and enables people to plan their lives and finances.

I shall pick out from the Bill proposals that deal with some of the financial issues confronting families and will solve some of the deep-seated problems with which families have to deal. In particular, I shall discuss the children's tax credit, the introduction of the new 10p rate and the raising of the threshold for national insurance contributions.

It is possible to over-egg a particular part of a proposal which, taken in the round, would help people on low and middle incomes. I am more concerned about my constituents who are on middle incomes than those on low incomes. The Bill will ensure that people are given incentives to work and to provide.

It is easy to underestimate the financial pressures that families face. I recently conducted a questionnaire survey in my constituency. It was linked to campaigning on a wider range of policies for families, but it is relevant to some of the issues that have arisen in the debate. All the findings pointed to money as the biggest problem for

families—and that in an area where most people are in work, so unemployment and hardship are not the issue. The fact remains that the incomes of working people are often inadequate to meet all the extra costs of bringing up children.

When people were asked what the biggest pressures on family life were, the answer that came out top for most people was finances, with balancing home and work in second place. When they were asked what would most help them to balance home and work, the single biggest issue mentioned by 25 to 40-year-olds—those with the biggest family responsibilities—was financial help with child care. For people going through family breakdown, too, the single biggest pressure identified was financial. We know from official statistics that those who are least likely to have savings are single parents and couples with children, and that having a child is the biggest likely indicator of poverty.

The proposals in the Bill, on top of the other measures introduced by the Government, will be of real help in providing the support that people want, which is financial help at the point of most need—when they have their children. That is why I welcome the children's tax credit provided for in the Bill.

I also welcome the fact that the credit is to be extended to stepchildren, which is a recognition that many children now live with step-parents, who often provide a supportive and caring home. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) drew attention to the schedules, and talked about the problems of calculating who would get the credit when families split up. Of course that will be an issue, but I am glad that we are recognising the fact that families are changing. If we are serious about supporting children, we must support them where they are, not where we might like them to be.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said that the Bill did not support marriage. However, the aim is to deal with the financial pressure points, not with issues about life-style choices. Looking after children is the financial pressure point.

I realise that the consequence of the introduction of the new credit is the abolition of the married couples allowance, which some people will regret. However, I believe that the Government have done the right thing in targeting children, and the parent who supports those children.

That is borne out by all the statistics about incomes and savings. A couple without children are likely to be among the more affluent in our society, especially now that so many women go out to work. It is not realistic to regard marriage of itself as a financial liability. Gone, thank goodness, are the days when a married man took financial responsibility for his wife. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) spoke clearly and eloquently about that. Having children, however, is a financial liability, and that is where the Government's help should be targeted.

The coming generation of women pensioners will be the first in which many have a proper record of contributions and savings for their pensions. It is therefore right that, as reflected in the Bill, we change the tax and benefit structure to ensure that those changes are carried through in a realistic way.

I am pleased to see that the married couples allowance is being retained for the over-65s. The lives of that generation were different, fewer women went out to work, and more were financially dependent on their husbands. They have fewer opportunities to adjust their income, so I am glad that the Government are keeping the married couples allowance for them. That is a welcome recognition of their position.

I welcome the proposed increase in the threshold at which pensioners have to pay tax, and the higher threshold for over-75s. During a recent consultation about pensions organised by Nationwide on my behalf, a cross-section of its employees made it clear that they regarded self-provision, not state provision, as the future for pensions. What they looked for from the Government was a supportive tax regime, rather than a series of handouts.

Many of today's pensioners have occupational pensions and other sources of income, and for them tax relief is the most effective form of financial help. That applies to many of the pensioners in my constituency. They are not reliant only on the basic state pension and associated benefits. The changes set out in the Bill are part of a wide-ranging series of changes for pensioners that I believe will make the Labour party the party for pensioners, just as it has made it the party for families. The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) tried to cast aspersions on the Labour party's record on pensions. That was a smokescreen to hide his party's failure over the pension mis-selling scandal.

The Labour Government have introduced the minimum income guarantee, the change to the threshold and the pension for carers, which will be extremely important in ensuring a continued level of contribution for women who look after children at home or disabled relatives. That, more than anything else, will encourage the caring attitude and support for family life that the Conservative party says it believes in but does little to promote.

I should like briefly to deal with savings because, although those measures are not in the Bill, they have been discussed at great length. Much of the discussion has been misdirected and destructive of some of the changes that will affect people and for which the Government are right to make provision. Much has been made of the high level of PEP and TESSA sales, especially in the past year. Those sales have resulted from major advertising campaigns. I would have expected people to pile into those savings vehicles during the last few months for which they were available.

The individual savings account deals with some of the changes in the financial regime that people will face. The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) said that high interest rates were good for savers. It is true that they were good for savers, but wildly fluctuating interest rates were extremely damaging to many private individuals and to industry. The regime into which we are now entering will, I hope, be a permanent one of sustainably low interest rates. That means that some of the conventional savings vehicles will not be so attractive. I believe that the individual savings account will enable people to have different types of savings, including equity-based savings, which will provide them with advantages that have so far been reserved for people on higher incomes.

The measures to deal with families and pensioners are just a small fraction of the provisions of the Bill. They are part of the Government's wide-ranging measures to support family life. They recognise the profound changes in families that have been brought about by women going out to work, and they recast the way in which we provide

[Ms Sally Keeble]

for our retirement. They are part of a much wider agenda; I believe that they will be welcomed by the public at large; and I commend them and the rest of the Finance Bill to the House.

9.8 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) made a thoughtful speech. If I had plenty of time, I would take issue with her on a few points, but I do not intend to speak for as long as some hon. Members. On the crucial issue of savings, the hon. Lady said that some of the comments made by Conservative Members had been destructive of the climate in which savings take place.

The savings culture in this country was badly damaged in the 1960s and 1970s—particularly the 1970s—and it took a huge effort to restore it in the 1980s and 1990s. That is why the savings ratio took a long time to recover. It eventually recovered: PEPs were introduced as part of an attempt to restore it.

It is important to bear in mind the fact that, although the Conservative party did not say so at the time, when PEPs were introduced they were a bit of a flop. It took several years of reforms and adjustments to the PEP regime for them to become part of the mass savings culture. What is destructive of savings is constant change to the regulations.

What the Government have done is to remove a brilliant brand. A successful part of the savings culture has been replaced with something that many people do not understand, and I fear that we will see a further dip in the savings ratio as a consequence.

My main theme is the macro-economic background, the fiscal and monetary judgment, that underpins the Finance Bill. I will briefly address three questions. First, do the Finance Bill and the Budget judgment make early entry into monetary union more or less likely? My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) touched on that issue earlier. Secondly, does the growth forecast support the overall fiscal position? Thirdly, are the measures in the Budget likely to encourage growth?

Let me first, in a short digression, pick up on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer). I was in the Treasury when the Germans and the French made their previous great push for the withholding tax. I well remember a lunch I attended with Nigel Lawson and Pierre Bérégovoy, when he was French Finance Minister. He leaned across the table at a crucial point in the discussions and said, "Look, unless we can have our withholding tax, all bets are off on this capital liberalisation directive." That was being discussed at the time. I thought that that had upped the ante. Lawson replied, "As a matter of fact, all those capital controls you have are great news for the City and we would prefer you to stick to them." That is how we fended off the withholding tax in the late 1980s. However, we must grasp the fact that the pressure for the withholding tax is relentless and remorseless, and it will not stop. If we fend it off this time with only a partial protection, we face the risk of erosion of the protection, in ways that are not always easy to foresee. That is why it is very important that the Government stick to what they have said and veto any measure for a withholding tax.

Unusually, the judgment in the Budget statement and Finance Bill was overshadowed by an earlier statement by the Prime Minister in which he changed the mood on EMU. He appeared to say that he wanted Britain to join economic and monetary union. The right hon. Gentleman came off the fence. In fact, his words were more equivocal than that, but that was the briefing given to the press. That was the background to the Budget.

If policy has changed, the Government will have to agree, sooner or later, to abide by the terms of the stability pact, which require a balanced budget or a surplus over the cycle. In the short term, of course, revenue is pouring into the Treasury, and the Government will not have too much of a problem. However, the Government are currently committed to a looser fiscal stance than contained in the stability pact, because they have formulated the golden rule for the public finances. That gives the Government licence for substantial borrowing. They can borrow almost as much as they like by reclassifying it as capital—although so far they have only done that to the tune of £7 billion, or a little less than 1 per cent. of GDP. The fact that the capital-current distinction is virtually meaningless—as everybody who has considered the issue agrees—means that the Government have enormous scope for flexibility. The Government will have to find a way to abandon that and tighten their fiscal stance, if they are to agree to the stability pact. But there was nothing about that in the Budget.

Then there is the issue of cyclical convergence. Our interest rates are nearly twice as high as those in the eurozone. Early entry to EMU would imply either tighter fiscal policy or, even more implausibly, a higher exchange rate than we have at present. Faced with a worse problem of the same type, the Irish did a bit of both, revaluing the punt just before entering EMU, and tightening fiscal policy. If the UK were to consider early entry, we would have to follow a similar course. We would not be able to allow the currency to depreciate. We would have to tighten fiscal policy. There is no mention of that issue in the Budget, even by implication.

The Government's exchange rate policy is the most important for EMU. Whatever the legal requirement—and there is some dispute over it—there will have to be a period of exchange rate stability before rates are locked. The Budget says nothing about that, and nor has any Government statement suggested that the Government believe that the Monetary Policy Committee should start to take the exchange rate into account as a target. The MPC will be told to stick to its last and to stabilise the internal value of the currency, not its external value.

The fact that the Budget and the Finance Bill virtually ignore EMU tells us that the Prime Minister's statement may have been little more than mood music. Furthermore, buried away in that statement was a new get-out clause from his euro enthusiasm. He added a sixth economic test that must be passed before the UK is prepared to join EMU.

What the Prime Minister said was scarcely noticed, but it is very important. He said that he understood the worries of those who were

"concerned about the type of euro zone that we might be joining."

He said:

"There are real problems in the EU"

requiring

"labour market reform . . . capital market reform . . . and product market reform."

Before Britain enters, he said:

"We are determined that these must be in place."—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1999; Vol. 326, c. 183.]

In other words, the EU must reform itself. He was talking not only about UK flexibility; greater EU flexibility has been added to the five economic tests, a sixth test.

There is a gap between the Government's mood music and the reality of policy on EMU. Nothing has been done over the past year that would not have been done in any event. Policy has not been altered in any way to take account of monetary union. If any hon. Member can think of a way in which it has been changed, I shall gladly give way to him or her.

This resembles the Government's policy making on many other issues. I could mention Kosovo, devolution and House of Lords reform. We have heard a soundbite, and we have seen the first steps towards a policy. But there has been no clear plan for reaching the end point on any of those issues.

To some degree, the same is true of the growth forecast, which has been given to us as a stated figure without any clear explanation of how such an adventurous forecast can be delivered. Why should we be able to obtain a higher medium-term growth rate? The Government are taking risks with the public finances. The Chancellor has spent a lot of money. The smallest ever spending reserves underpin his plans, and his Budget gave a lot of money away in various lollipop measures.

The green Budget contained some plausible forecasts, but, under the title "Alternative growth scenarios" in the Red Book, the Chancellor offers an upbeat story of 2.25 per cent. medium term growth and a very upbeat 2.75 per cent. growth scenario. That is hopelessly adventurous. We have not achieved 2.75 per cent. growth since the 1960s. I will be surprised if it is achieved.

It is not hard to imagine how the forecast could be upset. For example, does any hon. Member think that equity prices in the United States will avoid a correction? Does anyone believe that Wall street will carry on floating along at these prices? If so, I would gladly give way. No one thinks that the US equity market can carry on like this indefinitely. If there is a sharp fall in equity prices, United States consumer demand will collapse because the household savings ratio is virtually zero. Spending and consumer demand are being sustained from the growth in equity prices.

Our growth rate would take a huge tumble if the main motor of global growth stalled, as it will if Wall street takes a tumble. If the growth forecast is not achieved, fiscal policy will be in a huge mess, and the measures in the Finance Bill will not add up. That is a serious concern. I was amazed that I could find no mention in the Red Book of the balance of risk of a sharp slowdown in the United States economy as a consequence of over-valuation of equities. A Budget judgment has been taken without the identification of any public discussion of one of the most important risks involved.

There are many other reasons why I am worried about the public finances. The contingency reserve is half the average of the previous 20 years. A war is going on while the reserve is small. The war will bear on taxes more quickly than it would have if we had had a larger reserve. Asset sales are still written in at £4 billion a year. I will be surprised if the Government achieve that. Welfare spending is still rising faster than even the growth forecast. There is much pressure on the public finances. Everything is underpinned by the optimistic growth forecast. If it is not achieved, the whole pack of cards could collapse and there will be a sharp downturn in the fiscal position.

That brings me to the next question: will policies in the Finance Bill encourage growth? I will say something that I know Labour Members do not like. The fact is that Labour was not elected to run an alternative economic strategy; it was elected because people finally trusted it to run broadly the policies that it inherited. That is hardly surprising, because those policies had transformed our economic performance over the past 20 years. On economic matters, Labour's electoral chances will be prejudiced to the extent that policy diverges from that inheritance and the new global, free enterprise, conservative, economic consensus.

In some respects, the Chancellor has entrenched a sense of continuity with past practice. In fact, he has gone further, particularly by introducing Bank of England independence. However, bit by bit, in this Budget, he is diverging from the inheritance. Most important are the tax rises. Previous Labour Governments paraded tax rises as a legitimate instrument of social as well as economic policy, but they have learned their lesson. That was unpopular, so the Government have introduced taxes more stealthily this time.

All the same, Labour Members will have their work cut out explaining what the Prime Minister meant when he said:

"We have no plans to increase taxes at all."

Or when he said:

"I vow that promises we make on tax we will keep. This is my covenant with the British people. Judge me upon it."

Or what about the Chancellor? He said:

"We will not make promises that we will later break, we will not say one thing before the election and another after. Above all, we will be straight with the British people about tax."

How does all that square with the indisputable tax rises that we have seen in the past two years? It is worth bearing it in mind that those tax rises have taken place in a benign economic environment. What kind of tax rises will we see from a Labour Government in the depths of a recession? We might find out if there is a recession before long.

Labour talks as if it has abolished the business cycle when it refers to the end of boom and bust, but the business cycle has always been with us. There will be a recession. I do not know when, but I guarantee that there will be one. It may be sooner or later, but, when it comes, the relatively incautious fiscal position that I have described will be found to be extremely vulnerable.

It is not just on tax that the Chancellor is moving away from his inheritance. The Conservatives bequeathed Labour a tax system that was still too complicated, but was vastly simpler and less distorted than the one that the Conservatives inherited. I do not suggest that the Conservatives did not introduce distortive tax policies in Finance Bills, but the principles underlying Conservative Budgets were clear. We introduced lower and less distortive taxes. What we have in this Budget is higher and more distortive taxes.

The previous Government showed that, if the Government get out of the job of picking winners and out of the way of the wealth creators, capital will be allocated

[Mr. Andrew Tyrie]

more efficiently. It should be the job of the Government to reduce the tax burden and simplify the tax system. In the Finance Bill, we are now getting complications of the tax system and higher taxes. That will throttle growth and is a reason why I believe that the growth forecasts are unlikely to be achieved.

9.26 pm

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): You will notice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my voice has not the same vigour as usual. That will prevent me from responding in my customary style to the many comments made by hon. Members on both sides of the House during the debate and force me to focus on relatively few aspects of this wide-ranging Bill.

In the previous debates on the Budget, we had some discourse on the principles underlying it and what it was intended to do. Questions were asked about whether it was a Budget for jobs, for the family or for industry. I argued that it refocused priorities and gave greater support to families and children. Since then, I have pondered the question further and I still believe that the Budget epitomises the Government's policy of giving help to the people who need it most at the time when they are in most need, and recognises the needs of children in a way that previous Budgets simply have not. The sure start programme, the children's tax credit and the highest ever rise in child benefit are measures that target children in an unprecedented way.

The Budget is a Budget for stability. I commend my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's decisions so far on building stability in the public sector. I am impressed with the change from year-on-year public expenditure survey settlements, which were inefficient and ineffective. Expenditure in the public sector has now been refocused. Even more important, three-year forward planning has been introduced. The effect has been that extra money and revenue has been found for the Government's priorities of education, health, youth unemployment and crime. That refocusing has already enabled the Government almost completely to fulfil some of their main pledges, including class size and youth unemployment. Extra money for health is allowing the NHS to reform. The money has been used to abolish the internal market and cut waste. Those are all-important election pledges that need to be kept. The comprehensive spending review has enabled us to focus on them.

Health managers and local government officers have been telling me that the extra money is welcome and can be used on their local priorities, but three-year planning has had the most impact on some of their local decisions on how they spend cash as part of budget settlements. That has enabled them to make more sensible decisions. It has enabled them to focus their planning on services in local areas, using money more efficiently and effectively. That stability provides the ability to plan and to grow and we need it in the rest of the economy.

I come now to the rest of the economy, and in particular the textile industry. The labour force survey shows that 4,560 jobs in my constituency are dependent on the textile industry and I want to focus my remarks on how the Budget affects that industry. I take this opportunity to thank members of the Treasury team, especially my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Paymaster General, and the Trade and Industry team, especially my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, for listening so carefully to my concerns about the textile industry and its ability to grow and sustain itself through what has been a difficult trading period.

If people could be bothered to go to the mills, they would find, as I did on my visits, that mills can be most old-fashioned. The labour force in a mill can be extremely old. Unlike many other industries, which tend to employ people in the 30 to 40 age group, the textile industry is heavily dependent on a work force aged over 40 and possibly over 50. It is hard to find anyone in their 20s employed in the textile industry.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kali Mountford: I fear that the state of my voice will make it difficult to continue to respond, so I have decided not to take interventions. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. St. Aubyn: It would give the hon. Lady's voice a rest.

Kali Mountford: It would give my voice a rest if I was not diverted. The hon. Gentleman must not try to divert me from my course.

Training is most important for the whole economy, but especially so for the textile industry, because there is a clear skills gap. I do not pretend that that gap can be met by the new deal alone, but I am sad to find that the textile industry has not taken all the opportunities available to employ younger people using the new deal programme, even though some mill owners have told me that they desperately want to employ younger people. Other measures are available to them—the Yorkshire task force for textiles has produced a training programme using the ability of the industry, local universities and colleges and bringing all that expertise together. It is a pity that some people in the textile industry do not even know that the task force exists, but I hope that they will realise that it does exist and that it can benefit them.

I hope that people will listen to the Transport and General Workers Union, which has produced a plan for textiles, part of which refers to the need to fill that skills gap. The Government's programme contains measures that will enable the industry to fill that gap. However, even if the gap were filled, there would still be more for the industry to do. There are huge gaps in investment in the textile industry, which typify the gaps in investment in a range of our other traditional industries. For example, during one of my visits to a local mill, I was shown a loom that had been there since 1947. That piece of machinery would have been better in a museum than in a modern industrial economy. It was pointed out to me that a machine of that calibre cost only £600, so it was very cheap. People knew the limits of the machine; they knew how many times they would have to repair it and what the costs would be, and they knew about its production run. In other words, they had become comfortable with that old-fashioned technology.

If ever there was an industry that needed investment, it must be the textile industry. For example, one entrepreneurial mill owner told me that he was trying to

invest in new machinery. He was looking at quite old second-hand machinery with newer technology and it cost about £2,500. Even that sort of expenditure formed a large part of his annual budget, as his turnover was relatively low. It is extremely difficult for him to find the extra money that is needed for big investments in high-tech, computer controlled and operated textiles machinery, especially looms. I have seen some highly imaginative machines, mostly from America, that can produce huge runs of high-quality material at low cost, but the investment that they require would completely wipe out an entrepreneur of the calibre of the man with whom I spoke. Small and medium-sized enterprises cannot afford to pay the price that a loom with that sort of technology can command.

What can we do? An entrepreneurial mill owner such as the man I describe can benefit from the measures contained in the Bill. The measures previously introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor—especially the new 30 per cent. corporation tax rate and the capital gains tax changes in the previous Budget—have enabled that entrepreneur to invest in plant and machinery, but more needs to be done. Therefore, I am pleased by the introduction of the 10p corporation tax rate, which will help small and medium-scale entrepreneurs. I like to think that my right hon. Friend had the mill owner I am talking about in mind when he made that change—he certainly listened closely to me. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson), I welcome the extension of the 40 per cent. capital allowance for small and medium-sized enterprises to July 2000. I hope that it can be extended even further, because it would help the industry and the business that I am describing.

It might be hard to believe that the textile industry needs further research and development. To most people, woollens are woollens and knits are knits, and they have become accustomed to polycottons and other new fibres such as polyester, so they ask why new investment in textile research is needed. However, the competition in Europe and the demands of modern designers have ensured that it is no longer good enough to rest on our laurels and tell ourselves that the British textile industry has always produced the best woollen cloth in the world. Designers demand lighter-weight cloths with new designs and new weaves.

The relatively new mill owner to whom I spoke showed me some very imaginative designs. I was impressed by his imagination, his innovations and the style of material that he is able to produce, but he is unable to produce it in the right quantity to command the respect of the designers with whom he has to do business if he is to expand his business even further. He is dependent on fairly old-fashioned machinery and he cannot take his research and development programme further because of the constraints of operating within a small industry, so he cannot take advantage of the full scope of the European market for textiles.

Most of our textile trade goes to Europe—to Italy, France, Germany and Belgium. Companies in those countries are investing in high-tech machinery and, more significantly, in the new weaves of cloth and new types of fibre on whose development the growth of the industry depends. Although the textile industry is one of our more old-fashioned and traditional industries, it is an industry that needs to take on the challenge of change. The Budget and the Bill have the potential to enable the industry to take up that challenge.

At first glance, the tax credits for research and development might not appeal to textile manufacturers, but I would urge the entrepreneur I met to take advantage of that measure. If he does so, he will be able to compete on level terms with the Italian designers who are coming up with imaginative new yarns. I believe that he could benefit from the venture capital challenge. When banks do not want to take the risk of supporting a new small business and an unproven new fibre, that exciting measure can provide assistance. The £20 million for research and development, particularly in venture capital, could benefit that entrepreneur and enable his business to grow.

If businesses are to flourish, there must be economic stability. Several hon. Members asked what the Government mean by "economic stability" and equated the term with zero growth. Of course it does not mean that; it means having sure financial conditions that allow decisions to be taken for the future and enable businesses to invest with certainty, which must have an impact on the stability of the entire economy.

In the past 10 years, we have witnessed the slow decline and death of the textile industry in my area. Many jobs have been lost, and there are no mills remaining in parts of West Yorkshire that once depended heavily on the textile trade. That must lead to instability in local economies. My local economy has suffered serious instability in recent years and I want that trend to end. However, it must not be stopped by using old-fashioned interventionist measures that retain the same old jobs in the same old sectors.

We must regenerate the economy and bring the older industrial base into the new industrial age. We must produce the high-quality products that will make Britain successful. It is not right to hark back to some golden age when the means of production and growth were confined to a particular part of the economy. It is right to revisit the old economic values and reconsider how we can help businesses to develop today.

I believe the traditional industry to which I have referred will have a place in the new economy when it meets the challenges of change. A stable economy will develop if traditional jobs are sustained by producing the necessary high-quality products. The new investment capability in this Finance Bill will make that happen, and that is why I support the legislation.

9.42 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): When the Finance Bill was published before the recess, I must confess to feeling slightly elated. Having rushed to the Vote Office and eagerly demanded my copy of the Bill, I was pleased to see that it was rather shorter than usual. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and the hon. Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) also commented on the brevity of the Bill, and I congratulate the Government on that achievement. My elation was due partly to surprise because, on Budget day, the Chancellor of the Exchequer stood at the Dispatch Box and pulled out rabbits, gizmos and fizz bangs as if there were no tomorrow. I remember commenting to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) that, with all those gimmicks, the Bill was bound to be very long.

The brevity of this Finance Bill is explained partly by the fact that some of the Chancellor's gizmos are to do with national insurance, which will be covered in other

[Mr. Edward Davey]

legislation, and some—such as the cut in the basic rate of income tax—will be introduced next year. The Bill is also quite short because the Budget is far less substantial than it first appeared. The Chancellor has no philosophy for managing the tax system, and he has no strategy or direction regarding its development. He is getting a reputation for being a Chancellor of the big picture. He has sorted out the macro-economy by borrowing the Liberal Democrats' idea for an independent Bank of England—we welcome that move—and by laying fiscal foundations and introducing a code of fiscal stability. On smaller-scale economic policy, however, he is found wanting.

The Chancellor may eventually be starting to have some success, having made mistakes in macro-economic policy in his first two years—he had an awful lot of luck in the process—but he will make a severe mistake if he does not pay attention to the micro-foundations of economic policy. If he gets the micro-economics wrong, he will get the macro-economics wrong later, as sure as eggs are eggs.

What is the reason for the Chancellor's failure on micro-economics? He seems to be complicating the tax system. It is ironic that even a short Finance Bill contributes to the ever-growing complexity in the tax system, and that is the Bill's key shortcoming. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Fylde is not in his place, because he made a telling speech earlier in the debate which elucidated many of the extra complications in the Bill. He referred to the extra tax rates, including the 10p rate, and the retention of the 20p rate on savings. A third corporate tax rate has also been introduced. The new children's tax credit, with its rather complicated withdrawal system, will produce a marginal tax rate of 46.7 per cent. on a range of incomes around £30,000. There will therefore be much more complexity in the tax system.

Much of my speech was delivered by the right hon. Member for Fylde, so I shall ask a question that he did not ask. Why is the Chancellor creating more complexity in the tax system? Many commentators in specialist tax journals and the quality press are asking that question, and three theses have been put forward. The first is that the Chancellor has no interest in that policy area; he is leaving it to others and they are making a mess of it. Secondly, it is a ruse to hide and obfuscate the Chancellor's underlying strategies. Perhaps he has a redistribution strategy, but he does not want to tell anyone about it. The third theory is that tax complexity is a policy that is driven by presentational demands rather than an understanding of the demands of the users of the tax system.

Of those three theses to explain the Chancellor's tax strategy—or lack of strategy—the first two can be refuted. The Chancellor is hyperactive and he is involved in all aspects of economic and social policy in every Department. He seems to be a workaholic. He has a hand in almost every domestic policy announcement that the Government make, whether it relates to child care, employment or housing policy. The theory that he is not interested in the detail of tax policy does not stand up. He told us before the election and in his pre-Budget report that Labour's policy was pro-tax simplification, which demonstrates that he wants to be involved in tax policy.

The second theory is that tax complication is a ruse to hide alternative strategies. There have been many tax rises, as we have heard in this debate. I do not want to engage in what my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) called the debate about angels on pinheads—the mediaeval debate. Liberal Democrat Members do not want to have a statistical debate about whether the tax burden, as a percentage of gross domestic product, has increased. However, the Chancellor did not need to complicate the tax system to camouflage an increase in the tax burden because he can conceal that increase using statistics, as he has demonstrated in his description of the tax burden for this year, not including tax rises from previous Budgets that feed into the overall tax burden.

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman has been on his feet for six minutes and he has talked about the complexity that the Chancellor has introduced to the tax structure, but he has not yet managed to make a substantive criticism of what the Chancellor has achieved through that process. To talk about complexity and transparency, as Conservative Members have done, is not to deal with the benefits of the Budget that are being delivered to people.

Mr. Davey: My immediate response to that is, "Oh, dear." Labour Members clearly have no understanding of the tax system if they do not realise that complexity is a very real problem. Compliance costs to business are a serious issue, as is the effect on individual taxpayers. Does the hon. Gentleman realise that more than 9 million people now fill in their tax returns every year? Self-assessment is now widespread. If we complicate the tax system, we make it difficult for people to understand; if we make it difficult to understand, we reduce its transparency and undermine the Government's accountability to the people. Complexity is a major criticism, and I make no apology for its being the main theme of my speech, for however long I end up speaking.

I was trying to find a reason for the direction of the Chancellor's tax policy. I was considering whether it was a ruse to hide something else. Some people have suggested—I think that *The Economist* did so in an editorial on the Budget—that perhaps he was trying to hide the fact that there was some redistribution going on in the tax system. If that is the case, he is using a very large fig leaf to cover up that strategy, because the element of redistribution is very small.

The incomes of the bottom fifth are going up by 2.5 per cent. as a result of tax changes, whereas those of the top two fifths go up by 1 per cent. That is a redistribution, which we welcome, but it hardly requires the degree of camouflage provided by the overgrown complexity of the tax system. The real reason for the complexity is that the Government are driven in their tax policy by presentational requirements, not by the requirement to improve the tax system for the good of business and individuals.

We are entering an age in which the tax system is driven by soundbite economics and soundbite Budget statements. That is the new Treasury orthodoxy. In days gone by, although we might not have agreed with them, Chancellors of the Exchequer used to go into detail as to whether monetarism or joining the exchange rate mechanism were sensible policies. Those were the sorts of issues that Chancellors used to discuss on Budget day. Now, the Chancellor comes up with a few fizz bangs and soundbites,

and that passes as debate on economic policy. Frankly, it is not good enough. It seems that a Treasury mandarin is required to master the media, not macro-economics. That downgrades the economic debate.

We saw that very failure in the presentation of the Budget. A great deal of time was spent on tiny matters. At the beginning of his speech, the Chancellor spent much time talking about the 10p tax rate for small businesses, as if it were a huge change to the tax system. It certainly introduces an extra complexity, but it will make very little difference to entrepreneurial activity in this country. It costs a small amount and relates only to a small band of profits.

The Chancellor failed, however, to announce the very large tax changes that he was making. He did not let words to the effect that he was abolishing the 20p tax rate cross his lips. We were all left in some confusion until we read the Budget book and the press releases. As I said, the economic analysis that he provided to the House was devoid of content. The press releases revealed the complexity. We got it not from the presentation, but from the press releases.

I mention only one press release, on clause 19—the clause that introduces the new 10p starting rate of income tax. One would have thought that that was the simple soundbite tax policy of the Budget statement—the one that would grab voters and hit tabloid headlines. But the press release shows that the Government are introducing that policy into the tax system in a way that is far from simple. Paragraph 18 of the press release explains:

"The starting rate will not apply to income from savings. The rates of tax on savings income remain at the lower rate of 20 per cent. for income up to the basic rate limit and at 40 per cent. above that, except for dividends which, from 6 April 1999, will be taxed at 10 per cent. up to the basic rate limit and at 32.5 per cent. above that limit."

That is simple, is it not?

The tax system is becoming incredibly complex, and Liberal Democrats are concerned for our constituents, who are asked every year to try to understand it when they complete their tax return. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon said, the current series of Budgets from the Chancellor, including this year's Budget, is a gift to tax accountants.

It is even worse because, as tax policy and economic policy become driven by what sounds good and what will fit into a soundbite, the choice of policy is affected; so policies are chosen not for their merits, but because they sell well.

The Chancellor and many of his Labour colleagues are proud of the fact that they introduced the £100 fuel payment for pensioners. When one starts analysing whether a £100 fuel payment is a good use of public resources, one starts to question it severely. Is it a good policy? It certainly sells well. It may be included in leaflets to be distributed around a constituency. However, it is completely untargeted—it is worth the same to a millionaire pensioner as to a very poor pensioner. Moreover, it is extremely costly to administer. It has cost more than £10 million to set up the system, and the payment has cost more than £10 million every year to administer because it is given on top of the basic pension.

Mr. Gardiner: Would it be Liberal Democrat party policy to abolish that fuel payment?

Mr. Davey: We would put the £100 on the pension, so we would give pensioners exactly the same amount but save the country millions in administration costs. The Labour party is the party of bureaucracy and complexity, not just in the tax system but in the benefit system.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: I shall continue, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me.

We have a targeted pensions policy, which has been ably developed by my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). It is now becoming the accepted wisdom. Recently, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) wrote an article in a newspaper backing up Liberal Democrat policy for targeted increases in pensions.

Let me tell Labour Members what that policy is. For over-75s, we would increase the basic pension by £3 a week. For the over-80s, instead of the derisory 25p a week that they get, we would give them an increase of £5 a week. Yes, that is targeted, because the poorest pensioners are the oldest pensioners. *[Interruption.]* Some Labour Members shake their heads, but the figures for income distribution among pensioners and elderly people show a clear correlation between poverty and age. The older one gets, the poorer one is. That makes it essential to target extra resources in a very administratively efficient way, through the basic pension system.

Pensioners in my constituency feel completely betrayed by the Labour party. They hear that there is a minimum pension guarantee, but, when they read the small print, they realise that they are not eligible, and that it is no guarantee at all—not worth the paper that it is written on. Instead, some pensioners in my constituency are having the dividend tax credits that they used to get every year from the Inland Revenue taken from them.

The official Opposition were quite right, last year, to use an Opposition day to debate that issue, and we joined forces with them. We were very glad that some Labour Members actually criticised Ministers. Unfortunately, the Government were not to be moved on that, but we shall return to the issue during the Bill's passage—and we warn the Government that we shall return to the issue repeatedly. We shall not support a policy that has taken, on average, £75 a year from the poorest pensioners in our country.

Mr. Burnett: Does my hon. Friend recall that in the previous Budget a series of measures was introduced that directly penalised the less well-off, not least the change in capital gains tax retirement relief?

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend is exactly right. Small business men in my constituency, and small business women, were using the capital growth in their business as part of their pension. They were looking forward to retirement relief on the first £250,000 of that capital growth—a provision which the Government abolished—to fund their retirement. The Government have hit those people, but they have provided new capital gains tax loopholes for the super-rich. We have calculated that partners at Goldman Sachs will cash in to the tune of £500 million That is what happens when a Government go for complexity in the tax system, rather than simplicity. They

[Mr. Davey]

provide loopholes for the rich, who can afford clever accountants to exploit them. Simplicity is good for redistribution and for fairness.

The main theme of my speech is that the Budget and the Bill will add extra complications, and I have referred to the policies that affect pensioners. During the debate, however, Ministers and some Labour Back-Bench Members have lauded their policies on children. We support their move to give more money to families. A revolution is taking place in terms of how much money will be put into the hands of families with children. Of course, there are different ways of doing that. The Government have introduced four separate support mechanisms. We have child benefit, which all parties support. In addition, we have the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit, and we shall have the children's tax credit, which is being introduced in clause 27 and schedule 3.

We must ask ourselves why there are so many mechanisms. Why are they all needed? It is partly because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon can more ably explain to the House, the Government are fixated with the untested dogma that helping people through the tax system is somehow better than helping them through the benefit system. That is part of their rationale, although we do not agree with it.

The Government also have a plethora of mechanisms for helping families for presentational reasons. There is the desire to fudge the social security spending figures so that they appear to be channelling support through the tax system, thereby getting away with not admitting to the people that they are spending more on social security. If they believe in that approach, why do they not tell the people?

There is another presentational reason. The Government want to disguise their U-turn on their proposal to tax child benefit paid to higher-rate taxpayers. That is what the children's tax credit is all about. It would have been much simpler to go down the road that the Government opted for previously. That would certainly have been far more honest.

There is a real problem with having a plethora of mechanisms. First, there is the complexity of having four support mechanisms for families and children. Secondly, there is the cost element. The children's tax credit will mean that tax authorities will become directly involved with the marriages of and relationships between men and women. I would have thought that the Government had learned from the experience of the social security system, and more significantly from the experience of the Child Support Agency. We have seen what happens when Government bureaucracies become involved in the minutiae of relationships between men and women. However, the Government are now suggesting, through clause 27 and schedule 3, that the Inland Revenue will become involved. They will come to regret that. Labour Members will have people saying to them, "I do not understand how this is happening. I do not understand why my husband"—or wife—"is getting more of this tax credit."

The Government have used four pages of schedule 3 to try to describe how they will work out the different demands of men and women. The right hon. Member for Fylde quoted from those pages, and those Members who were present will understand how complex the proposals are.

It is not just the bureaucracy surrounding those proposals that is complicated, but the new marginal tax rate of 46.7 per cent. that is to be introduced between the low £30,000s and the high £30,000s as the tax credit is clawed back. Such complexity has a cost for our constituents. There is a lack of comprehension about where the support to which they are entitled is coming from. That is bound to lead to a problem of take-up and a waste of resources.

This morning, I was at the Playbox playgroup based at Kingston Methodist church, painting a picture with the help of two young children. It was interesting to speak to people who work at the playgroup. They were worried that the Government's policies were pushing up the fees that they had to charge. They did not realise that extra help would come from the working families tax credit.

The Government have become stuck on their own presentational fork. In trying to make things easy for themselves in the hothouse of Westminster, they are failing to present their policies properly to the people out there. They are shooting themselves in the foot. I do my best to explain the Government's policy for them. My constituents say, "That is a bit complicated," and I advise them to come and see me. I am more than happy to help them out, but, if the Government want to get the benefits of their own policies, they should make them simpler.

I remember when Labour Members were in opposition. They used to complain about the Tory Government and say that they were fiddling the figures, with 21 changes to the employment statistics—*[Interruption.]* Indeed. I believe the correct figure is 22. They used to complain that the Tories used to cut taxes nationally and load the tax on to the local taxpayer by increasing the council tax. Now the Labour Government are doing the same thing. Not only have they stolen the tricks of the Tories, but, worse, they have added a bundle of their own.

We see that in the Red Book, which is set out not as a proper financial report, but with chapters whose headings are politically biased. The chapters are entitled not "The state of the public finances", but "Increasing Employment Opportunity", "Building a Fairer Society" and so on. Is that objective? Does that state that it is the Government's report? No—it puts a spin on it. Spin doctors are determining official Government documents. That is leading to an information deficit in the House. We are not getting the information that we need for our debates, and it is not being set out objectively.

We on the Liberal Democrat Benches do not believe that the Bill deserves a Second Reading. It deserves to be referred to the Advertising Standards Authority, the Plain English Campaign and many other bodies. It complicates our tax system and makes life far more difficult for our constituents and for businesses.

10.8 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I welcome the Bill which, together with other measures that have been enacted or are planned, shows that it is possible to combine the search for social and economic justice with support for initiative and enterprise. The other developments that go with the Bill include public investment, investment in our health and education

services, the beginning of measures to address the needs of a public transport service, and wide-ranging and far-reaching support for business, including financial measures and the creation of regional development agencies.

Both the main Opposition parties seem to be aggrieved by the Bill, the Conservatives because it seeks to change the system that they established and that failed the people of this country so badly, and the Liberal Democrats because they resent the effectiveness of presentation and because they are so trapped by their own rhetoric that they join the Conservatives in opposing the working families tax credit, which will put about £23 extra into the pockets of the families who need it most. The Liberal Democrats seem to be acting under the delusion that it is possible to govern without complexity. Anyone who has tried to govern will know that complexity is an aspect that must be handled. What really matters, however, is that the direction of policy should be correct. The policy in this Finance Bill is directed towards social justice, combined with the development of our economy.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), in response to an intervention, said that he did not want to turn the debate into a debate about all our yesterdays. I am hardly surprised by that, given that the "all our yesterdays" of the last Conservative Government led to more inequality than the country had seen since the last war. As a result of the economic deficit that that Government created, not one region outside London could match the European average in terms of gross domestic product per head, and the social deficit was so marked that the National Institute of Economic and Social Research considered adding a new category—that of the socially excluded—to its social class categorisation.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) expressed the remarkable view that the Labour Government had been elected to continue the policies of the last Government. In fact, the Government were elected—with a majority rarely seen before—to change what the last Government had done. I am pleased to note the direction taken by the Bill, which builds on the work already done by the Government. That direction is towards social equity, and the development of economic initiative and entrepreneurship.

One of the most unacceptable features of the economy inherited by the Government was the penal rate of taxation imposed on the poorest people. Because of the way in which the tax and benefits systems worked together, when the Government came to power 750,000 poor people faced effective tax rates of 70 per cent. or more as they tried to better themselves. The number has now fallen by two thirds, although we have further to go. That has happened because of the Government's consistent and determined efforts to deal with inequality, and to look at the tax and benefits systems together with the aim of bringing about more justice and creating incentives for those who are working hardest.

If we examine the measures in the Bill, we see that the Government's policy is directed towards seeking more social justice. Twenty million households will be better off, including 7 million with children; 700,000 children will be taken out of the worst poverty; and child benefit has already been increased by 25 per cent., which is the largest increase ever. Because of the introduction of the working families tax credit—opposed by both Opposition parties—families will have a guaranteed income of £200 a week. The Government are introducing the long-awaited system under which families whose incomes are no more than £12,000 a year will not be taxed.

The working families tax credit will bring many benefits, including proper child care credits amounting to up to £100 per week per child. There are also the new low tax rates—the new low base rate, and the new low rate of 10p in the pound. That 10p rate will take 300,000 of the poorest people out of tax altogether, and will halve the tax bill of 1.8 million. Cuts in national insurance contributions will mean that 900,000 of the poorest people in work will not pay contributions. The Government have included all those measures in the Bill to address problems of inequality, and to start to make it possible for us to give more justice and incentives to those who need them.

The Budget does more than look directly at economic injustice; it looks to supporting business—the creation of wealth. The new 10p rate of corporation tax supports small businesses in particular, and the main rate of corporation tax was cut last year.

I welcome the continuation of support in tax incentives for investment, tax credits for research and development, and the changes in the enterprise investment scheme to permit more small companies to benefit and encourage more start-ups of more new companies. I also welcome the extension of capital allowances and the setting up of the Small Business Service. All those measures, put together, send out a message to business—a strong message that the Government are supporting businesses and that practical measures are being taken, and will continue to be taken, to support them.

I represent Liverpool, Riverside—an inner-city constituency which must rank among the poorest in the country. It is in the city that is No. 1 on the list of cities with urban deprivation—and one of the poorest areas in Europe, qualifying for objective 1 funding. In that area of urban deprivation there is great poverty, but also great initiative and enterprise. I welcome the Bill because it, together with other measures that the Government have introduced, will assist my constituents, as it will assist people elsewhere in the region and in the country.

The Bill will give direct assistance to people who are suffering acute poverty, and the extra finance—including the additional £23 a week which will soon go to into the pockets of people with families who are most in need—will make a direct difference to their lives. For someone who is very poor and struggling to survive, £23 a week is a significant amount which will make a real difference. I say: shame upon those who voted against that measure in the Budget.

I welcome the Bill's support for business. There is great entrepreneurship in Liverpool and businesses are developing and thriving. The regeneration policies being introduced and developed by the Government mean that there are increasing opportunities for business development and business support.

The Government are backing business, and the Bill will give it further support. General measures are already in place to develop an effective infrastructure and create a supportive atmosphere for business, for business start-ups, for expanding businesses and for businesses growing out of the regeneration initiatives; so the Bill will help businesses to survive and prosper and to create more and much needed employment.

[Mrs. Louise Ellman]

The Bill takes us a step further to creating a fairer society—a society that addresses social and economic injustice and supports enterprise that benefits the community as a whole. I welcome the Bill and hope that the whole House will support it. I say: shame on those who vote against the Bill; those who oppose it are opposing help for those who need it most and help for the enterprise economy.

10.19 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I hope that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) will forgive me if I do not follow her detailed critique of the Bill with my own, because we are coming under some slight time pressure.

So many Budgets are greeted on the day with great cheers, but, the more one examines them, the more one sees the flaws. Many of my hon. Friends have analysed in great detail the problems of this Budget and the difficulties that the Government have stored up for themselves.

I shall mention briefly one or two issues of particular interest to my constituents. For instance, the small businesses that have been badly affected by the increase in red tape are disappointed because the Small Business Service will, so far as they can make out, teach them how to use e-mail, but will not help them with their regulatory problems. There is an even more detailed concern among many people who use their own limited companies to do their work. They are worried that those may be abolished in the sacred name of combating tax avoidance.

When we add up all the complexities that the Government have introduced to the tax system, it is clear that there will be a return of the tax avoidance industry. If this Budget is for anyone, it is for the accountants.

I shall spend most of my time talking about the same subject as I have spoken about in Finance Bill debates for the past five years. Indeed, I remember that, when the Economic Secretary to the Treasury was first appointed, I welcomed her to my annual contribution about smuggling and bootlegging. The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) spoke on the very same subject. It is refreshing that at long last the Government have recognised that the problem is growing by leaps and bounds, and have acknowledged an official figure for lost revenues—£1.5 billion.

Just before Christmas, I went to Dover harbour and saw an exercise in which Customs and Excise, the transport arm of DETR, the Benefits Agency and the police worked together to pick up the white vans. Twenty-six vehicles were dangerously overweight with beer and tobacco. Ironically, the drivers were allowed to telephone local taxi firms and hire taxis to take away the excess goods, so they got clean away with bringing in excess tobacco and alcohol. Eight of the vans were prohibited as defective, and 90 people were interviewed by the Benefits Agency. I understand that the agency reckons that it saved £31,000 in benefits on that morning alone. There were also customs seizures of about £19,000 worth of tobacco and alcohol.

If that was the effect of a by no means comprehensive exercise lasting only a few hours on one day just before Christmas, it is easy to imagine the sheer volume of tobacco and alcohol being smuggled and bootlegged.

The Budget has done nothing to make any difference. The Chancellor patted himself on the back for having frozen alcohol duty, but that will have no effect because the price differential is such that it is still extremely profitable to smuggle alcohol.

The Chancellor increased the revenue from cigarettes. At least, he thinks that he has increased the revenue from cigarettes, but in fact he has only increased their cost. He is simply encouraging worldwide smuggling. A packet of cigarettes from South Africa costs only 70p, so it is worth smuggling in crates and pallets full of cigarettes from somewhere that far away—not to mention the profits made by smuggling from Europe, especially from Belgium.

Inevitably, we are seeing the knock-on effects on health. The fact that the number of people smoking in this country is increasing has been confirmed by studies by Mintel, the British Market Research Bureau and several other respectable organisations. The Department of Health's figures prove the same thing.

We are building up a smoking-related health problem directly related to the increase in cheap tobacco. The Government cannot say any longer that the high price that they have put on tobacco is stopping people smoking—first, because it is palpably not doing that and, secondly, because wherever people are in the country, they can get cheap tobacco.

It would be logical and sensible to face the problem squarely. The tendency has been for the Government to build up customs services and prevention, and we shall see what effect that has on the return for the revenue men. The Government are now building up greater bureaucracy. Indeed, they have asked for product marking, which will add to the costs of industry. Industry rightly responds by saying that, if the Government would only reduce excise duties, it could afford to pay for that.

I emphasise again and again that the only answer to this problem is to reduce the excise duty on tobacco and alcohol. If we were going to debate this issue on the Floor of the House, I would table amendments to the Bill.

Sir Robert Smith: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Lait: I am terribly sorry, I shall not give way, because I want to allow the Front-Bench spokesman time to reply to the debate.

I seriously suggest that the only solution to this problem is for the Government to grasp the nettle and reduce excise duty on tobacco and alcohol. History shows that, in the long run, revenue would then increase again.

10.25 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): This has been a good debate, with a number of thoughtful and well-informed contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House. It seems a long time ago that the Chancellor delivered his Budget speech outlining some of the measures that we have debated today. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) referred to the initial burst of enthusiasm that greeted the Budget, with headlines in *The Sun* such as "Everyone's a winner". As he said, it did not take people long to realise that anything but that was the case.

The first flush of enthusiasm that greeted the Budget barely lasted 24 hours. Since then, enthusiasm has given way to disappointment, which in turn has been replaced

by anger as more and more details of the stealth tax increases in the Budget have gradually emerged. We were told at the time that everyone would be better off, but it did not take long to discover that many people would face tax increases not tax cuts. Once again, the reality is very different from the presentational gloss.

The new 10p starting rate of income tax, which has been referred to by a number of hon. Members, is a typical public relations gimmick. By restricting it to the first £1,500 of income, it will make only a small difference to most people's tax bills. However, by reducing the amount of income that is covered by the 10p rate and by abolishing the 20p rate, the Chancellor increased the marginal rate of income tax for a significant number of people.

According to the Government's own figures, about 4.4 million income taxpayers will have a taxable income of between £1,500 and £4,300. As a result of the Budget, the rate of income tax that they pay will rise from 20p to 23p in the pound. As the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) said, the Chancellor overlooked that aspect when he made his Budget speech. It is also a direct breach of the Labour party's pledge at the last election not to put up income tax.

It is not just those 4.4 million people who have been conned by the new 10p rate. It became clear only after the Budget that savers on low incomes will also lose out. In a throwaway line in the Budget debate, the Chancellor said:

"The tax rates on savings will remained unchanged."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 188.]

Not many people picked up that line at the time, and those who did probably thought that they had misheard it, but it was no mistake. People whose income is derived from a small amount of savings will not enjoy a 10p starting rate: they will continue to pay 20p in the pound on their savings income. As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said, as a result of that, almost a million pensioners will get no benefit from the 10p rate.

It should come as no surprise that a Government who were willing to deprive 300,000 pensioners on the lowest incomes of a tax refund of £75 a year on their dividend payments should now penalise pensioners who pay tax, albeit at the lowest level. As the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton said, we shall want to return in Committee to the issue of the dividend tax credits for non-taxpayers.

The chief executive of the Birmingham Midshires building society was right when he described the 20 per cent. rate on savings as "unfair and contradictory". The Chancellor should even now listen to the representations of Age Concern, the *Daily Mail* and the "Money Box" programme on Radio 4, which are all calling on him to put the situation right.

Married couples will also lose out from the Finance Bill. The abolition of the married couples allowance for those under 65 will cost couples almost £200 a year extra in tax. It also finally removes from the tax system any recognition of the state of marriage. In his Budget, the Chancellor said that the allowance would be replaced by the children's tax credit and, as a result, the typical family with children would be left better off. However, they will not be better off next year, as we now find that the children's tax credit will not even come in until 2001. Nor will they be better off if either partner is a higher rate taxpayer, because they will lose the credit through the operation of the taper system. The result is the ludicrous situation in which a couple each earning £30,000 a year will receive the entire children's tax credit, while a family with only one earner on £36,000 will see it tapered away.

It does not stop there. Many married couples do not have children or, if they have, their children have grown up. According to the Government's figures, there are 6.4 million married couples who benefit from the married couples allowance but do not have children who are eligible for child benefit, and another 300,000 have children who receive child benefit but those children are aged over 16. They, too, will get no benefit from the children's tax credit and will end up paying more in tax.

The only exception is the pensioners, who retain the allowance. However, in a phrase the significance of which became apparent only after the Chancellor sat down, he said in the Budget speech that he was restricting the exception to "Today's pensioner couples". Any couples who are unfortunate enough to reach pensionable age after April next year will lose the allowance and gain no benefit at all.

The Chancellor said in the Budget that he was providing a better deal for families and children, but he certainly did not for one type of family. Couples who have divorced or separated, with one person paying maintenance, will also have to pay a lot more. Some 300,000 taxpayers will lose relief on the maintenance payments that they make for their children, costing each on average about £220. For some, the figure will be considerably higher. Those who separated before March 1988 can currently get tax relief at the higher rate of 40 per cent., but from next year they will receive no relief at all. Many parents paying maintenance already resent having to pay large amounts as a result of the actions of the Child Support Agency, as hon. Members know. For those parents, that Budget measure will be another blow. When the Chancellor was asked about it in an interview after the Budget, he did not even know about it, despite its appearing in his own Red Book.

Home owners will also pay more tax under the Finance Bill, as a result of the abolition of mortgage interest relief. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) described that as removing a massive distortion from the tax system. However, according to the Government, it is not a taxation measure at all. Instead, we are told that it represents a reduction in public spending. That conveniently overlooks the fact that, in the last Parliament, the reduction in mortgage interest relief was cited by the Labour party as one of the alleged 22 Tory tax rises.

In the Budget speech, the Chancellor said that the allowance was worth on average £2.50 a week. Most people are mystified as to how he reached that figure. In fact, it is worth about £4 a week and, in total, about 19 million home buyers will pay a total of £1.9 billion extra in tax each year.

Those who buy homes worth more than £250,000 face the extra costs of the increase in stamp duty. Last year, 45,000 residential transactions would have been affected. Some would say that those who can afford a house worth more than £250,000 can afford to pay the increase. However, in the south-east, in constituencies such as mine and that of my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

(Mr. Bruce), £250,000 does not buy a mansion. The increase will affect many people with families who aspire to buy a bigger home.

Business will bear the brunt of the stamp duty increase. Some 65 per cent. of total receipts from stamp duty on transactions of more than £250,000 comes from commercial property and land transactions. The measure will put up the cost of commercial property, and that will hit businesses. Even more seriously, it will have a direct impact on commercial property values, making it harder for small and medium-sized firms to raise loan finance.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) spent some time on the threat posed to the City of London by the possible withholding tax. Rightly, he expressed astonishment that the Deputy Prime Minister appeared, only last week, to be totally unaware of that proposal, which puts at risk 10,000 jobs. My hon. Friend suggested that that might imply that the matter had not been raised in Cabinet. I very much hope that he was wrong. It is, perhaps, more likely that the Deputy Prime Minister was otherwise engaged when the matter came up, possibly looking at tigers or examining a coral reef.

Whatever the explanation, my hon. Friend was absolutely right to say that the proposal represented a huge threat to one of the most successful component parts of our economy. If it goes ahead, the Eurobond market will be permanently lost to the UK because it will transfer to Switzerland. For that reason, when this proposal was first made in the 1980s, the then Government made it clear that it was utterly unacceptable.

We heard a fascinating account from my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) of the negotiating tactics that Lord Lawson employed to put a stop to that absurd measure. As a result of that action, the proposal was dropped by our European Community partners, but the Government have refused to make the same commitment this time. Instead, weasel words have allowed the other countries of Europe to believe that we are prepared to compromise on this matter.

One of the Bill's most pointless and counter-productive tax rises is the increase in duty on tobacco. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) has followed that issue closely for many years and she made some powerful points. The Government are already losing at least £1.5 billion in revenue as a result of smuggling and cross-border imports. About 15 per cent. of the market has been taken by imported cigarettes, and each small retailer of tobacco loses about £42,000 in sales revenue each year.

The Chancellor blindly ignored that evidence as, yet again, he imposed an increase of 5 per cent. The price of 20 cigarettes in the UK is about £3.80, while the price in Belgium is about £2. It is hardly surprising that a huge number of people take advantage of that difference.

Sir Robert Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not as I have only a couple of minutes left.

The policy of annual rises in the price of cigarettes has clearly failed, as the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) was brave enough to acknowledge. According to the Government's own estimates, revenue will fall this year. The time has come when the Government must think again. In terms of health, revenue and law and order, their policy is not working, and a new approach is needed. At the very least, they should take their heads out of the sand and freeze tobacco duty at its present rate.

Of all the many unpopular and damaging measures in the Budget, the worst is the increase in duty on hydrocarbons. Motorists in rural areas bitterly resent being treated by the Government as a cash cow. Many have no choice but to use their cars. The justification that raising the cost of petrol will encourage people to leave their cars at home is entirely spurious. People know that the only justification for raising petrol duty is to raise more money for the Government. It is not an environmental or transport measure, but a tax-raising measure pure and simple. Motorists have no choice but to pay the fuel duty, with the exception of those living in Northern Ireland. I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) on that.

While most motorists have no choice but to pay the duty, the haulage industry can choose to fill its tanks with diesel in the United Kingdom and pay British rates or in France and Belgium and pay about half the amount. Even before the Budget, hauliers warned that the differences in duty rates threatened to wipe their industry out, yet the Chancellor ignored their pleas. He did not increase the rate of duty by only the 6 per cent. escalator; he increased it by 12 per cent. To ensure that there was no chance of industry being able to compete, he raised the rate of vehicle excise duty on 38-tonne trucks to £5,750—six times the level in Belgium and 12 times the level in France. The anger throughout the industry is genuine and justified. Hauliers see their livelihoods being destroyed by the Government without any benefit to the environment. The only gainers will be their competitors on the continent, who can hardly believe their luck. Even now, I urge the Government to come to their senses and think again.

The Bill enacts a Budget that we were told would cut taxes. Instead, it contains a catalogue of stealth tax increases on savers, married couples, fathers paying maintenance, home buyers, the self-employed, smokers and motorists. It is the third instalment of a tax-raising programme that directly breaches Labour's promises at the general election. I urge the House to vote against it tonight.

10.41 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Barbara Roche): Let me start by agreeing with the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale). This has been a good debate with valuable contributions from Members on both sides of the House.

The Finance Bill marks yet another step on the road to delivering a stronger economic future for our country. Conservative Members laugh, but we know the legacy of unemployment and lack of productivity that we were left with and our task in dealing with it.

The Budget and the Finance Bill build on a strong foundation for economic stability. The Budget offers a better deal to business and delivers a better deal for Britain. The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford laughs when I talk about business. I know

that he has strong views on the burdens on business. I recently read an early-day motion that called for

"ministers within their respective Government departments whose brief includes deregulation to reinvigorate their laconic record".

I am sure that he agrees. The problem is that that motion was tabled against the Conservative party when it was in government by its own Back Benchers in 1996. He was one of its main signatories. It is not my policy to embarrass him. I want only to make him remember his past mistakes so that he can repent of them.

The Budget continues to lock in the economic stability that the Government have delivered by keeping public finances under control. We have taken tough and decisive action with a new framework for monetary policy by making the Bank of England independent and setting up a new framework for the public finances based on tough rules. The excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), the distinguished Chairman of the Treasury Committee, noted the effective co-ordination between fiscal and monetary policy. We are already seeing the benefits. Inflation is close to its target, mortgage rates are at their lowest for 33 years and we have cut borrowing by £29 billion in our first two years in office. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was able to deliver the Budget that the Finance Bill implements—a Budget that is good for those in work, good for families and, very important, good for business.

The Budget provides a platform for stability. We have as a country to raise our game, to deliver higher productivity for the long term, better skills, and greater innovation and competition. In contrast to the somehow golden legacy that the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) spoke about, there is a productivity gap that we need to fill. There is a 40 per cent. performance gap between the United Kingdom and the United States of America. We have a duty to fill it. The measures in the Budget, including support for productivity, for research and development and for innovation, which were well emphasised by my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford), are aimed at just that. We have introduced a new 10p rate of corporation tax for small companies. That halves the tax rate for the smallest companies and benefits a great number of small and growing businesses.

The hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) suggested that, despite all the measures that I have mentioned, this was not a Budget for small business. But the Government feel very supported in their aims by the excellent comments of the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman)—we recognise that he has a great deal of business experience—who said, immediately after the Budget statement,

"Not a bad Budget for small businesses."

With recommendations like that, we know that we are on the right track.

A number of points were made during the debate about savings. The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) spoke about the new ISAs. Perhaps Opposition Members have not looked at the figures on the take-up of ISAs. In one week, one of the providers sold 0.25 million. When many people in this country—half the population—have little or no savings, that is a major step forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) and others spoke about the fuel escalator. It was interesting to hear what Opposition Members had to say. The right hon. Member for Wells is not in his place at the moment, but he said that if the Conservatives were fortunate enough to be returned to power they would abolish the fuel escalator; but when asked very tellingly what he would cut to make up the £1.5 billion shortfall, he could not answer. Perhaps that explains why he is not in his place.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) also spoke about the fuel escalator. He was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) about his position, because the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Government who introduced the escalator. The right hon. Gentleman replied that, as Financial Secretary, he was not responsible for the fuel duty escalator imposed by his colleague the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I have heard about the previous Government's lack of collective responsibility, but this takes the biscuit.

Mr. Jack: The Financial Secretary is being uncharacteristically inaccurate in reporting what I said in my defence. I was asked whether the escalator was my responsibility. I pointed out that it was not, but I also owned up to the collective responsibility that all of us in Treasury at the time had for taking difficult actions to put our public finances right.

Mrs. Roche: Of course I accept completely the right hon. Gentleman's clarification, although I doubt whether it aids his cause with the House.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the documentation covering the Budget, as did the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer). The hon. Member for South Dorset even used the expression "smoke and mirrors". The documentation accompanying this Budget gives the fullest account ever of the Government's objectives; every tax change has been clearly spelt out.

The right hon. Member for Fylde also mentioned transparency. I agree with him that transparency is important. That is why we have introduced the new monetary policy framework of which transparency and accountability are central elements. The Monetary Policy Committee is subject to parliamentary scrutiny by the Select Committee on the Treasury and by the House of Lords Select Committee on the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England. Our Budget reporting is underpinned by the code for fiscal stability.

The hon. Member for Gordon spoke about cider. As he knows, the problems were identified by the Conservative Government in 1996 and the alignment was necessary to fulfil the commitment made by the United Kingdom. However, he did not mention a fact that might perhaps have supported the debate: that the National Association of Cider Makers has supported this Government's action throughout.

There has been much discussion about tobacco and the worrying problem of smuggling; for instance, it was referred to by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley,

[Mrs. Roche]

Central (Mr. Illsley) and, towards the end of the evening, the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait). I was disappointed by the comments of the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford on that subject. The Conservatives, rightly, introduced the tobacco escalator. I remind the House that smoking kills more than 13 people an hour and there is a particular problem among young. The hon. Gentleman's response to that is that there is a problem with smuggling.

Smuggling is rather a romantic name for what is organised crime, leading to great criminality in various areas, which hurts decent, law-abiding people. The answer of the Opposition—who used to pride themselves on being members of the party of law and order—is that, because there is a problem with smuggling, we should attack the duty. They attack the duty rather than the criminals. The Government have put resources into tackling that problem. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General has put a great deal of effort in working with Customs and Excise to that end.

In an extremely well-considered speech of the kind that the House is accustomed to hear from him, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) supported the ending of mortgage interest relief at source and made some important points about the housing market. I am sure that the whole House appreciated his remarks.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Lady has correctly pointed out that the tobacco and fuel escalators were introduced by the previous Administration. As I recall, the intention was to double the price of fuel in real terms within a certain period. Does that remain the Labour Government's intention? When can we expect the escalator to stop for tobacco and fuel?

Mrs. Roche: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, there are clear environmental and health objectives underlying all our policies on those matters. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I know that the Opposition do not like hearing Ministers speak, but they have made some lengthy speeches this evening—one was 47 minutes long. I am not saying that I was bored—all the speeches were fascinating—but the Opposition might want to hear the Government's response.

The Government believe that enterprise and fairness can go hand in hand and that one supports the other, and that is why the Budget was a Budget for enterprise as well as fairness. It is why the Finance Bill will help families by paying an extra £416 directly into the pay packet of all lower and middle-income families with children—an important point that was made extremely well by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble). It is also why, from April next year, we shall increase child benefit by 3 per cent. in real terms.

There was discussion about the winter allowance for pensioners, which will increase fivefold to £100 for every pensioner household in this country. That measure was warmly welcomed by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar). I listened with interest as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton attacked that measure. I wonder whether he lives in the real world, because I know what pensioners in my constituency have said and how warmly the measure has been greeted. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) spoke about our priorities for public spending.

There was also discussion about the working families tax credit, and I thought that I detected a split in the Tory ranks on that subject. The hon. Member for South Dorset—someone I know well, having crossed swords with him on several occasions—was asked whether a Conservative Government would repeal the WFTC, and he said, rather fairly, "We'll see how it works—we'll see." It pains me to break the news to him so publicly, and I am sorry to have to do so, but his view is not shared by Conservative Front Benchers—their view on that subject is entirely different.

In addition to all the measures that I have described, we have been able to add to money for education and health, and we are providing a major new £1.1 billion boost from the capital modernisation fund.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the Financial Secretary give way?

Mrs. Roche: Of course.

Mr. Bruce: If she reads *Hansard*, the hon. Lady may realise that I said that it may well be that the Labour Government will withdraw the WFTC because it does not work.

Mrs. Roche: I think that I detect another change of heart, but I do not want to add to the hon. Gentleman's misery. It is possible that promotion to the Front Bench is in the offing for him, and I do not want to do anything to spoil his chances.

The Finance Bill will enact a Budget that builds on a strong foundation of economic stability, advances a modern framework of efficient public services and encourages a dynamic Britain of enterprise and fairness. It represents a better deal for our country, one that puts work, enterprise and families first. The Bill will cut tax rates and implement far-reaching tax reform, while simultaneously boosting public investment, and it will do so at the right time for our economy. The Government are giving all our people a better deal for work, a better deal for the family and a better deal for business. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 132, Noes 341.

Division No. 146] **[10.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter

Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*

Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dan *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 164.

Division No. 147] **[11.13 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Eliman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David

Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
Macknlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm

Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Day and
Mrs. Eleanor Laing.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That—

(1) Clauses 2, 28 and 99 be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

(2) the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

(3) when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.—*[Mrs. Roche.]*

11.25 pm

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I am sure that I am not the only Member who believes that careful consideration should be given to the motion concerning the clauses to be debated on the Floor of the House before the Bill goes into Standing Committee. I welcome the fact that on the Floor of the House we will debate the petrol duty, the loss of the married couples allowance and the unwise proposal, in the view of many people outside the House, yet again to increase stamp duty.

I suggest that we should consider other measures to be debated on the Floor. Although this is not as long a Finance Bill as the one that we had to suffer last year, it is wide-ranging and covers matters that may not be as well addressed and publicised in Standing Committee, where not as many hon. Members will be able to contribute as would be possible on the Floor of the House.

For example, I could have referred to clause 53, which deals with employees who work in education and training. I am sure that many hon. Members want to speak about that, but I know that the time on the Floor of the House is limited. I could have suggested that we consider the clauses relating to student loans and to the enterprise investment scheme.

However, there are two clauses that it will not be possible to debate under the terms of the motion and deserve proper consideration by the entire House. I refer, first, to clause 121, which relates to

"economic and monetary union: taxes and duties".

It is a wide-ranging clause which seems to give untrammelled power to the Inland Revenue to spend taxpayers' money promoting economic and monetary union before any referendum on the matter has taken place.

I am grateful to the Inland Revenue for providing such a clear note in the guidance on clauses. It states that the clause

"provides legal cover for Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise to spend on preparing for the possibility of UK entry to the single currency."

The note continues:

"The Revenue Departments may need to spend some tens of millions of pounds".

but the amount proposed in the clause is unlimited. We need to debate on the Floor of the House whether there should be a cap on that amount. The note refers to tens of millions of pounds being spent before the United Kingdom even has a referendum on the issue.

The note goes on to state:

"Some of this expenditure would go beyond current Parliamentary guidelines."

If a short clause in the Bill proposes such a radical measure, surely it is right for it to be considered by the whole House, rather than being kicked up into a Committee Room, where Ministers and Labour Members no doubt want to sweep it under the table.

If we are to have a debate about economic and monetary union and whether the Inland Revenue should be spending money on it, we should also consider whether we should approve clause 59. Clauses 59 and 50 relate to investments and securities, and concern tax avoidance in that context. As we all know, the Government are under great pressure—in connection with a wholly misguided system of tax avoidance—to attack, in effect, investments and securities held through the Eurobond market. A debate on the Floor of the House on those clauses, and on amendments tabled by my hon. Friends and me, would give us an opportunity to prevent the Government from entering into any arrangement with other members of the European Union that might introduce a withholding tax on such securities and investments.

Only today, representatives of the Swiss Government and Swiss monetary authorities visited London. They have a clear message to deliver about withholding tax on investments and securities. The message—to London, to the Government in particular and to the European Union—is that such a tax cannot work; but we have not debated the matter since it was last raised, over the weekend during a meeting of the European Union Finance Ministers. We need such a debate on the Floor of the House. Not just thousands but tens of thousands of jobs will be at risk if the Government give in to pressure from Germany and other members of the European Union. That is simply not acceptable—and we are talking not just

about thousands, or tens of thousands, of jobs in London; in constituencies such as mine, job losses will result if the matter is allowed—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman is now starting to go into the details of a debate that will, in fact, take place in Committee. I should be grateful if he would stick to the point.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Thank you for helping me to stick to the matter with which we are dealing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nevertheless, if we are to consider these clauses, we must consider what is to be the range of the debate about them.

The clauses relating to the bonds that I mentioned, involving tax avoidance, raise many other issues. It is in the spirit of the Bill to crack down on tax avoidance, and there is no desire on my part—or, I believe, on that of any other Conservative Member—to allow people to get away with it; but we question the methods proposed in the Bill.

In dealing only with clauses 2, 28 and 99—which, as I have said, concern petrol duty, the married couples allowance and stamp duty—we are not dealing with all aspects of those matters. For instance, it may not be within the ambit of the debate on clause 99 for us to consider a different level of stamp duty for different types of property. If we debated more clauses on the Floor of the House, we could consider that here rather than in Committee.

If the debate on clause 121 went its way, I would hope that we could discuss the enterprise investment scheme. The Government are now trying to go halfway towards correcting the problems that they created before, while leaving many people who invested in small businesses far worse off than they were before the Finance Act 1998. I believe that the clauses relating to that scheme would also benefit from being discussed on the Floor of the House.

Finally, there are the clauses relating to value added tax. Given the terms on which the Bill is referred to a Standing Committee, it will not be possible to debate VAT matters. A matter that we tried to debate last year relates to the art market in this country, which is threatened by a serious increase in VAT. Unless we are allowed to debate the VAT clauses on the Floor of the House, it may not be possible for us to raise an important issue that may threaten as many as 5,000 jobs in London alone if no action is taken in the next few months to prevent the increase in VAT on art sales in this country that is in the pipeline.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it proper for an hon. Member to talk about an issue when he has not declared an interest? I understand that the family of the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) owns St. Michael's mount, the castle and the paintings in it. Now he has advocated—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not make such complaints across the Floor of the House. If any Members have an interest to declare, I have no doubt that they will do so. If the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) has any complaints, he should pursue them through the normal channels.

Mr. St. Aubyn: My family has no plans to sell any works of art; besides, the property mentioned by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) is owned by the National Trust. I hope that he pays it a visit, provided that he is prepared to pay his way.

The art market affects many Members of this House—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time.

11.36 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I am astonished at the performance of the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn). I was going to say that perhaps he did not realise that the clauses that will be discussed on the Floor of the House were requested by his own Front Benchers, but the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing)—who is about to leave the Chamber and who is, I understand, a member of the Opposition Whips' Office—was encouraging him.

Mr. St. Aubyn *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: Please sit down. We heard from the hon. Gentleman for long enough.

I assume that Conservative Front Benchers knew about that arrangement, which suggests how they intend to conduct proceedings. The hon. Member for Guildford could have made those points during today's proceedings; he chose not to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Question is as that on the Order Paper. As many as are of that opinion say, "Aye". [HON. MEMBERS: "Aye."] The hon. Member for Guildford, having spoken against the motion, must shout, "No".

Mr. St. Aubyn *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must simply shout, "No".

Mr. St. Aubyn: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think the Ayes have it.

Question agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We shall first take motions 3 to 5.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 42) on the Promoting Independence: Partnership Grant for 1999–2000 (HC 301), which was laid before this House on 23rd March, be approved.

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 43) on the Promoting Independence: Prevention Grant for 1999–2000 (HC 302), which was laid before this House on 23rd March, be approved.

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 44) on the Promoting Independence: Carers Grant for 1999–2000 (HC 303), which was laid before this House on 23rd March, be approved.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation),

EDUCATION

That the draft General Teaching Council for Wales (Constitution) Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 22nd March, be approved.

That the draft General Teaching Council for England (Constitution) Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 22nd March, be approved.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Question agreed to.

Road Traffic Accidents

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

11.38 pm

Jackie Ballard (Taunton): Despite the lateness of the hour, I am pleased to have secured this debate on an issue that could concern any of us at any time. Each year, about 3,500 people are killed on our roads and many thousands more are injured. Often, they are totally innocent parties—the victims of either accident or recklessness.

People who have been bereaved or are themselves injured have to deal with trauma and grief as well as the complicated set of procedures that follow a road crash, including insurance claims and possible criminal or civil prosecutions. Research by the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims found that a large proportion of people bereaved on the roads suffer long-term health problems and depression. The federation said that practical and legal support, as well as emotional support for bereaved families, was needed urgently.

Currently, the Home Office and Victim Support provide valuable help and support for people bereaved through homicide and for victims of crime, but there is no such support package for victims of road accidents. I have been told by the chairman of the all-party group that many victims of road incidents find the term "accident" difficult to cope with because, so often, such incidents are not accidents, but are caused by dangerous or reckless driving or by thoughtlessness.

Last year, many Members signed early-day motion 1235, calling for automatic support and advice for people bereaved through road accidents.

The organisation BRAKE, which campaigns for safer road transport, is also campaigning for traumatised victims to receive proper support. It believes that the way in which an individual has been traumatised, whether through accident, recklessness or crime, should not be the basis for discrimination with regard to the provision of care, advice or support.

I shall give the House some details about constituents of mine who first came to see me more than a year ago, because it is their experiences that have led me to seek the debate. The 18-year-old son of the family was driving his father's car, with his mother in the front passenger seat. They were stationary at a junction waiting to join a major road when an approaching vehicle went out of control and hit their car, causing it to spin round several times before coming to rest. They had done nothing to contribute to the incident.

The 18-year-old driver had what appeared at the time to be minor injuries, but his mother was more severely injured and was taken to hospital by ambulance. The son found that his injuries affected him physically for a long time, and his confidence in driving was badly damaged. He was about to start a college course, and needed to rely on his father to move him to London and transport him to other places. The family live in a rural area with little public transport, where car ownership is not a luxury but a necessity.

Since the accident, Mrs. Larcombe, the mother of the driver, and her family have been through much emotional trauma and have had many practical difficulties to

contend with, alongside their health problems. Following the accident, for example, they lost personal belongings such as clothing that was bloodstained or cut off by the hospital, spectacles and items that were in the car. No one told them to cancel the car tax on what was now an unusable car. That may seem like a small issue, but, when people are counting the pennies, a month's car tax that one could have reclaimed is important.

The family have now had four years of dealing with insurance companies and solicitors. That, too, was a new experience for them. They say that the insurance companies that they have dealt with have made them feel like victims over and over again as they are sent for medical examinations, sometimes to see a specialist 70 miles away from home. Mrs. Larcombe has visited the local hospital for treatment more than 150 times, and she is still awaiting an operation.

The Larcombes contacted the local Victim Support organisation, thinking that that was the place to go for help, but were told, correctly, that its code of practice and its constitution limit its work to advice and support for victims of crime.

The family had taken out legal protection with their motor insurance, but felt that they had little say in the progress of their claim. Mrs. Larcombe says:

"When the insurance company says you have to attend a medical examination you feel you have to jump".

When she was once asked to attend a medical examination many miles away, she was sick several times in the car while on her way to be examined by the specialist at the behest of the insurance company. Her son was asked to attend an appointment during his college exams.

Those people have told me that they feel that information is needed, either on admission to hospital, if people are in a fit state to receive it, or at least when people are leaving hospital, to set them on the right course, with a checklist of what to do and whom to inform. I repeat that, for many people, the experience of being involved in a road incident for the first time brings them into contact with a range of other issues that they have not had to encounter before. There they are, through no fault of their own, having to deal with professionals and organisations that they have not had to deal with before.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The hon. Lady is raising some important points, and at the beginning of her speech she mentioned the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims. Is she aware that the principal author of the report to which she referred is a Swiss gentleman, who has advised Members of Parliament at an open meeting that in Switzerland a counselling process has been created, parallel to the equivalent of our victim support system?

Jackie Ballard: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. No, I did not know that. I understand that there is also an organisation in this country, of which I was unaware, called RoadPeace. Certainly my constituents were not made aware of it when they were in need of advice and support.

I bring this case to the House's attention because Mr. and Mrs. Larcombe were unfortunate enough, two years after the initial incident, to have a second car written off. It was parked in a London street, so thankfully this time they were not in the car. In the past four years, they have learned more than they ever wanted to know about the need for help and support for victims of such road accidents. On the phone to me this weekend, when I told her about securing this debate, Mrs. Larcombe said that the whole experience had made her feel as though she was being screwed into the ground.

Insurance companies are happy to take our premiums, but are not so eager to deal with claims. We have all had constituents who have had problems trying to get insurance companies to deal with their claims. Companies are not keen to deal with claims, even when it is obvious who the innocent victims are. I appreciate that in some road accidents or crashes it is not obvious who is at fault, but it is sometimes clear who is not at fault.

Thousands of people each year have experiences similar to those of my constituents. I have two suggestions to put to the Minister. He is from the Home Office, and one of my suggestions is for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, but I am sure that he can pass it on to his colleagues. Funding should be given to Victim Support to enable it to extend its remit to include victims of road traffic incidents.

My second suggestion is that the Government should, through the Motor Insurers Bureau, urge insurance companies to draw up a simple checklist which could be issued by the police or by hospitals or other professionals who came into contact with people immediately after a road traffic accident.

I hope that the Minister will be able to offer my constituents and the thousands of others in a similar situation some hope that in future the system will be improved, so that other people do not have to go through not just the physical problems, but the emotional trauma and the practical difficulties that follow from such incidents.

11.47 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): The House will be grateful to the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) for bringing this important subject to the fore. The Larcombe family have been well served by her interest in this matter. The House will wish to extend its sympathy to them. Their experience is by no means uncommon.

The debate gives me, on behalf of the Government and, I am sure, the whole House, an opportunity to pay tribute to the police and the road safety organisations that work tirelessly to reduce the terrible toll of death and injury on our roads. I also pay tribute to those who provide care and support for victims and the bereaved during the difficult times that are all too often the consequence of road traffic incidents such as we are discussing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) has, over the years, supported RoadPeace in its valuable work of campaigning on behalf of the victims of road traffic incidents. It is worth noting that its contribution has helped to put this issue on our national agenda. The hon. Lady and my hon. Friend referred to the European experience of road crashes. Our record on road safety is very good compared with other countries, but there is no room for complacency, and we can always learn from others, not least about support for victims. It is right that the House should continue to pay attention to this issue.

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

I had the pleasure—and it was a pleasure, even though it was also a challenging experience—of appearing recently before the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee to discuss road traffic and the Government's proposals for an integrated transport system. The Committee is rightly considering the roles of the Home Office and of the DETR together. That is our approach, because we recognise that we need to work across the departmental boundaries if we are to maximise the support that we can give to reducing accidents and fatalities on the road and to advancing road safety policy so as to achieve the most effective impact on road accidents, deaths and injuries.

My colleagues at DETR who are responsible for road safety policy launched in October a review of speed policy. It will advance our policies as outlined in the integrated transport policy White Paper, and will consider—in relation to safety, mobility, the economy and the environment—ways in which we can draw on informed opinion outside the House and expertise in the civil service. That review will be completed by autumn this year and will make specific proposals on speed policy.

Later in the year, we will also announce a new road safety strategy, designed to replace Campaign 2000. That too will be designed to target road casualties and to reduce them by 2010 in line with the comparable baseline figures from 1994 to 1998. That strategy will concentrate specifically on child safety, safety for vulnerable road users, speed, driver training, impairment and other issues. It will take forward a raft of proposals on enforcement issues. The police service will put its best efforts into supporting Government strategies designed to reduce road traffic casualties.

Mr. Miller: Will my hon. Friend consider encouraging Members of Parliament to participate with the police and the Institute of Advanced Motorists in improving driving skills? If we gave a lead, it might encourage progress on some of the safety issues that can stem from better driver training.

Mr. Boateng: Certainly, hon. Members who drive can help to set an example, although they should always do so with some humility, bearing in mind the pressures and strains under which they operate, which are not always conducive to road safety. It is possible—my hon. Friend is right to draw it to our attention—to encourage in our constituencies the acquisition of the skills that will assist in reducing road traffic incidents.

The Home Office recently published a report produced by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary that takes a thematic look at the policing of road traffic and related areas. That has been helpful in the promotion of good practice and in spreading it across the country. Indeed, Lord Whitty, the DETR Minister in the Lords, launched that report with me as another example of joint working on this matter.

A number of important initiatives are occurring on road death bereavement. The Victim Support working party published a report, "Support for Families of Road Death Victims", in 1994. We provide a substantial annual grant to the national charity and its 365 local schemes and branches so that they may provide practical help and emotional support to more than 1 million crime victims each year. The charity has dealt increasingly of late with referrals after road deaths.

In March 1992, Victim Support's national council set up an independent working party to identify problems and ways to resolve them. The hon. Member for Taunton said that we had not always equipped Victim Support to help, and that issue is being addressed. A great deal of progress has been made, and we are working closely with the charity to take forward the recommendations in its report.

Jackie Ballard: The Minister said that Victim Support can help after road deaths. Is that after a prosecution has found that someone is to blame, or can it help immediately after a death without waiting for a prosecution?

Mr. Boateng: There is no reason to wait, and good practice suggests that schemes ought not do so. Victim Support regards this as an area in which it wishes to help, and it is being funded to do so. In response to pressure from Victim Support and its work with the charity, the Association of Chief Police Officers has endorsed a service delivery standard that covers road fatalities and support for bereaved families.

In the past, various police forces have published their own literature to support the bereaved. The Association of Chief Police Officers' traffic committee is in discussion with me and my officials about moving towards a standardised approach to provide specific support literature across the forces. That would deal with some of the distressing practical issues raised by the hon. Lady when an early word of advice or common sense could take an enormous burden off the minds and shoulders of those who live with the consequences of an incident.

The hon. Lady referred to the road safety research organisation BRAKE, an arm of which, the trauma advisory service, has produced five useful information booklets. The Government, through the Department of Health, are putting money into developing those booklets. The first two—"Coping with grief when someone you love has been killed on the road" and "Procedures following a death on the road in England and Wales"—are in general use by counselling organisations and are used widely by the police.

Road safety will continue to be of concern. We hope to continue to bear down on the number of road traffic fatalities and injuries. But there is a need for continued alertness and sensitivity. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising the issue. We shall continue to work, not least with the voluntary sector and those campaigning organisations without which this important matter would not have received the attention that it deserves. We owe a great debt of gratitude to them and to the many families who live with fatalities and other incidents that cause grief and concern. We owe it to them to get our policy and practice right.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 21 April 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Pensioner Poverty

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

9.35 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): When I tell the House that

"Older people are more likely to be living in poverty, whether this is defined as below half-average income or the receipt of means-tested benefits,"

I am using not my words but those of Sir Donald Acheson in his report on inequalities in health, commissioned by the Department of Health and published last September.

In Britain today, one in four older people live on incomes that are less than half national average earnings after taking housing costs into account. However, it is often in the personal and the specific that we come to a better understanding of what such figures mean in practice. For some time, I have been a regular visitor to the Sutton Seniors Forum, which meets in my constituency every month. With a regular turnout of 160 people, it is one of the fastest growing of such forums anywhere in Greater London.

That interest prompted me to initiate this debate, but the final spur was a letter from a Cheam constituent which arrived in my constituency office last week. My constituent and his wife might not fall under the definition of poverty that I gave earlier, but the letter expressed sentiments that will find an echo in the constituencies of many hon. Members. Let me quote briefly from it:

"We are pensioners aged 65 and 67, we have the state pension, a very small private pension, and pensioners bonds that mature this year, making up our total income."

He goes on to describe the impact of price increases, tax changes and interest rate cuts, which, in his words,

"must be affecting many pensioners like ourselves. We have some hard earned savings but the interest is peanuts, so to meet the shortfall in income we will have to use our savings, but they will run out one day, and then presumably we live off the state."

Many older people are in the same boat as my constituents—living on a fixed income whose value is steadily eroding, while outgoings are steadily rising. That is the lot of far too many older people. That is where the Acheson report comes in; its recommendations stated that older people need higher state benefits to improve their living standards and, therefore, their health. A decent income is the foundation on which everything else rests.

What is a decent income? Last year, Age Concern published a report entitled "Raising the Wage of Retirement", based on work by Professor Eric Midwinter. In his analysis, Professor Midwinter came up with a figure of £150 per week per person, but even that is modest in comparison to average earnings. At the time, only 27 per cent. of single pensioners had gross incomes at or above that level and only 28 per cent. of couples had at least £300 per week. The amount spent on the three basics that we all need—housing, fuel and food—takes a far greater share of poorer pensioners' outgoings. Figures suggest that a single pensioner who relies on state benefits spends more than half of his or her income on those basics, while a two person non-retired household spends only 37 per cent. When other hon. Members have the opportunity to speak, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) will be able to draw the House's attention to some figures on fuel poverty that he recently obtained. I could not believe the figures because their impact was staggering.

Professor Midwinter put the matter clearly. In the report, he stated:

"Many older people cannot live 'ordinary' lives, simply because they have insufficient incomes. They can stay alive, they can exist, but they are effectively excluded from much of what we would regard as normal life."

What is to be done? The Government's answer is more means testing for more pensioners, but that will condemn hundreds of thousands of people to a life of poverty. Indeed, as many as 700,000 older people who are entitled to claim income support are losing out now—on average by £16 a week. How a means-tested benefit can be called a guarantee is beyond me.

What about pensioners who have incomes of less than £68 per week, but are disqualified from income support because they have savings of £8,000 or more? There are more than 600,000 such people caught in that savings trap. The Government's Green Paper, published last year, says a lot about income support, but very little about the basic state pension. However, the trends are clear; the steady erosion of the basic state pension began under the Conservative Government, when the link with earnings was replaced by a link with prices. That erosion is set to continue. In 1980, for every £100 of average income, the basic state pension amounted to £21; by 2010, it will have fallen to only £13.

The Government are often criticised for placing far too much weight and reliance on the work of focus groups and other research tools in determining their policy and direction. Would that it were so in the case of pensions. Last year, the Department of Social Security published research note No. 83 on pensions and retirement planning, which makes for interesting, but depressing, reading. That research found that most people aged under 40 believe that the state pension will disappear, and that older people do not see the state pension continuing for their children or for their children's children. However, almost no one—according to that research—wants the state to withdraw. People want the Government to stay in the pensions business for the long term. When it comes to providing a basic, bread-and-butter foundation pension, the research found that the fairness, universality and dependability of the state pension carried much weight with the vast majority of a representative sample of the population.

The research certainly bears out the views of many of the members of the seniors forum in my constituency and, I am sure, of a great many people in this country. A couple of quotes from the research document are especially relevant. It states:

"Most people feel that a state pensioner should not need to claim income support—indeed, they see this as paradoxical."

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

It continues:

"There is also often disquiet about the fact that Income Support thresholds can leave those who have worked to provide for themselves with a small occupational or personal pension worse off than those who have made no provision at all. This appears unfair and demotivating."

It certainly is. The Green Paper rightly raises the possibility of some changes being made to the thresholds. Will the Minister tell us when decisions will be taken and, more important, when those decisions will be announced to the House; and when changes that will benefit our constituents will be made?

I acknowledge that the Budget contains welcome improvements to the circumstances of pensioners, but one or two unfortunate, and perhaps unintended, signals were sent to older people. Take the new 10p tax rate: it delivered good headlines on Budget day, but the small print revealed that pensioners with small incomes from savings were not to benefit from the new tax rate. Almost 1 million older people will continue to pay 20p of every pound of savings income in tax. The savings to the Government derived from not extending the benefit of the new tax rate is only £55 million. I hope that the Minister will assure the House today that the Government remain open-minded and are willing to consider the representations from a wide range of organisations, not least Age Concern. I wonder how much, or how little, the Treasury consulted the Department of Social Security on the new 10p rate. What message should older people take from their exclusion from that tax rate?

Another issue that focus groups picked out was the belief that British pensioners do not fare well by European standards. That is hardly surprising, because it is true: average incomes of older people in the UK are lower as a proportion of average income of the total population than in most other European countries. Older people in this country are over-represented among the poorest 30 per cent. of the population compared with older people in other European countries.

The Budget can best be described as a bit of a curate's egg for pensioners—good in parts. The basic state pension remains, but the earnings link was broken by the Conservatives in 1980s. To restore that link fully and catch up from the time it was broken would cost £12 billion. My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) raised that matter on Monday during Social Security questions, and the Minister of State made it clear that restoring the earnings link for the basic state pension was not an option that the Government would consider. To be honest, I doubt that Liberal Democrat Front Benchers are likely to declare a commitment to such a policy either. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, had the link been maintained, a single pensioner would today have a pension of £94.50 per week.

The minimum income guarantee is income support by another name—means-testing pure, but not simple. However, even after the downward revision of the figure, we know that 700,000 older people will not claim that to which they are entitled. The Government have initiated a series of pilots to try to boost take-up, and that is welcome. I hope the Minister will give the House an update on how the pilots are progressing—it would be interesting to know what take-up rate the Minister believes can be achieved. If take-up is low, the minimum income guarantee is no guarantee at all.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): Does my hon. Friend agree that a new category of poor pensioners consists of widows who thought that they had been left well-off by their husbands? The dividends they receive from invested income has now dwindled and, because of that, the consequences of any structural damage to their houses, such as a leaking roof, can be that they have no income at all. Does my hon. Friend agree that that category of pensioner has never been adequately addressed by the Government?

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. Some people who are described as asset-rich but who live on low incomes are caught by the way in which the current income support system operates. I hope that the Government will consider how to address that problem; if they do not, they will condemn many of our constituents to lives of poverty and increasing desperation as their properties deteriorate around them.

From my experience of attending meetings of the seniors forum and other gatherings of older people in my constituency, I know that an issue that often provokes anger, outrage and a sense of frustration is the age addition at the age of 80—the extra 25p which appears in one's pension book on one's 80th birthday. It is not even sufficient to pay for a first-class stamp to stick on the letter that expresses one's opinion, whether positive or negative, and it has remained unchanged since 1971.

Evidence collected by my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon from written parliamentary answers makes it plain that extra financial help would be best targeted on older pensioners. The poorest pensioners are older pensioners, and women pensioners are even poorer than men. According to the most recent figures, for 1996–97, pensioner couples where the man was over 75 had a net income of £226 per week, compared with £259 net income for those under 75; and while a single male pensioner had an average net income of £141, a female pensioner had to live on £126. That is why I strongly support the development of a pensions policy that targets more help on older pensioners. Liberal Democrat policies to increase the state pension for the over-75s by £3 a week and for the over-80s by £5 a week represent a good step in the right direction. There is no danger of low take-up and no stigma, and administration costs would be low, but the measure would be effective and get help to far more people than the so-called minimum income guarantee.

When preparing for today's debate, I came across a very interesting speech made at a conference last September by Chris Daykin, the UK Government Actuary. He put the issues very clearly, saying:

"In the UK, where the level of flat-rate social security provision is relatively low, public opinion seems to favour raising the basic pension to a more realistic level, rather than relying on means-tested top-ups."

He must have been reading the findings of the Government's focus group work, because the research demonstrates strong support across all age groups for a decent pension. The research found that working participants in the focus group were willing to pay more national insurance to pay for an increase in the basic state pension of at least £10 per week, and even as much as £30 per week, for a single pensioner.

The final issue I want to raise during this debate is that of long-term care. I realise that that is not one of the Minister's direct responsibilities, but I hope that he will be able to say a few words on the subject.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Before the hon. Gentleman goes on to the subject of long-term care, I should like to compliment him on his excellent research and tell him that I support the thrust of his argument. One constituent of mine has only a 40 per cent. pension, because he did a great deal of voluntary work overseas. He put some money aside in savings and does not qualify for income support, although he does receive housing benefit. However, his income has now fallen by 20 per cent. Are there not many people like my constituent in the country? Should not the Government reconsider the way in which they deal with pensioners who tried to provide for their retirement, but who are now penalised for having done so?

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman's constituent could represent many others who, for one reason or another, find themselves without a full basic state pension, despite the important contribution that they have made to society. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon has tabled written questions on that subject and obtained detailed statistics that I do not have at my fingertips this morning. I hope that the Minister will take account of the point raised by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and ensure that it is considered during the consultation on the Green Paper.

Returning to the issue of long-term care, this week alone about 1,400 older people will be forced to sell their home to pay for their care, and the emotions that that provokes range from bewilderment to anger. There is a real sense of betrayal—those people have paid in throughout their lives, but when they need the state to support them, it is not there. The royal commission reported at the end of February and its report concludes that there is no demographic time bomb and that the costs of care are affordable. The royal commission also supported an approach to paying for long-term care that is based on some kind of risk pooling. The current situation whereby people must rely on income or savings is neither efficient nor fair owing to the risk and the sums involved. Finally, the royal commission believes that most efficient way of pooling risk is through general taxation, based on need rather than wealth.

The Government have said that they will debate the royal commission's recommendations, and I hope that the House will soon have an opportunity to consider the matter in greater depth. Time is pressing, and uncertainty about the future funding of long-term care must be ended quickly. Decisions need to be made. The absence of a clear timetable from the Government has fuelled widespread cynicism about Ministers' intentions in this area. How soon does the Minister expect action from the Government?

I am grateful for this opportunity to air several issues affecting my pensioner constituents. I hope that the Minister will say something about the 10p rate, the income support take-up pilots, the derisory 25p extra per week for the over-80s and the urgent need for a clear timetable for decisions on long-term care. I shall finish where I started by quoting from the letter of my constituent:

"We are not moaning money grabbing people that drive a large car, or travel the world two or three times a year, nor can we afford private health care. All we want is to be able to live the rest of our lives in some degree of comfort, not living off the state, not living off my children, and if we do need hospital treatment it will be available."

That is a reasonable request and I hope that the Government will meet it.

9.51 am

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): The House has listened carefully to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), whom I congratulate on introducing this subject this morning. However, the hon. Gentleman had difficulty in congratulating the Government on their achievements in assisting pensioners over the past two years. I think we should congratulate the Government on their strenuous efforts to help old and disabled people in receipt of pensions.

The Government's first act was to cut value added tax on domestic fuel bills. While that cut applied across the board, it was particularly important for people on pensions. The Government have also increased substantially the winter fuel allowance. Under the Tories, old people had to suffer seven days of temperatures below freezing before they qualified for £7 or £8 to assist with their fuel bills. A winter fuel payment of £100 is now paid to pensioners.

The Government have abolished charging for pensioner eye tests. The Liberals used to complain loudly about such charges, but the hon. Gentleman did not mention that reform in his speech. The Government have offered help to the poorest pensioners in the Budget by reinstating the link with earnings. That is a step in the right direction, and I know that the Government will continue down that road.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the Government's assistance to the poorest pensioners through continuation of the link with earnings. He is presumably referring to the link with earnings through the minimum income guarantee. Is he aware—as my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) made clear a moment ago—that the poorest pensioners do not receive income support, even though they are eligible for it? Therefore, they will not be helped by that link with earnings.

Mr. O'Brien: The Liberals will clearly not accept any move to strengthen benefits and to help eradicate pensioner poverty. The Government have introduced several measures that benefit the poorest pensioners. For example, the Government decided recently to compensate former mine workers whose health was broken by the conditions in which they worked underground. Some 100,000 retired mine workers—many of them my constituents—will receive the largest compensation payment ever made in this country. The Government are keeping their promises, and these issues are worth mentioning in this debate.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that that compensation was awarded after a long, hard-fought and ultimately successful High Court action?

Mr. O'Brien: Indeed, and I congratulate the mine workers who pioneered that claim. However, credit must go to the Government for not challenging that decision and for establishing the means of awarding that compensation.

[Mr. O'Brien]

There is still much to be done to improve the quality of life of old and disabled pensioners and to tackle pensioner poverty. After 18 years of Tory Government, which took so much away from our old people, pensioner poverty remains. I am pleased to have an opportunity this morning to express views on behalf of my constituents.

The Government must have regard to the gross inequality of the concessionary television licence scheme, which is part of the pensioner poverty issue. The concessionary television licence scheme required urgent review, and I am pleased that the Government have kept their promise and are in the process of that analysis. However, I plead with the Government to treat all old people equally under that scheme, as occurs with the winter fuel allowance. Many old people cannot afford BSkyB, so they miss out on those programmes that used to be broadcast on terrestrial television. Since BSkyB purchased the television rights of major sporting events, many of my constituents who are interested in sport have difficulty viewing those programmes. Television is the only means of entertainment for many old people, and I congratulate the Government on taking the initiative and deciding to review the concessionary television licence scheme. Let us get it right this time.

I draw the attention of the House to the previous Government's attitude towards local government. Under the Tories, many local government services upon which old people relied were withdrawn or charges for such services were levied or increased. As a result of the Tory Government's attacks and their application of capping and the rate support grant to local government expenditure, local government was forced to withdraw, or to levy charges for, services such as home help, assistance with bathing and personal hygiene, and help with gardening and decorating.

Bus deregulation has made it difficult for many old people to travel around their districts because of reduced services and the withdrawal of buses from certain routes. It has created pensioner poverty because pensioners must now rely on taxis. We all know that, when local government provided bus services, old people received more attention and were catered for better. Cross-subsidisation helped many of our constituents. I support the national bus pass scheme that the Deputy Prime Minister is considering, and I urge the Government to speed up its implementation. It will provide major assistance to our old people and help to reduce pensioner poverty further. That is another example of the Government's delivering on their promise to equalise public transport facilities for our old people.

It is the same with law and order. Every week, we hear about attacks on the elderly—many of which occur in their own homes. Our old people are very vulnerable to attacks because they cannot afford to install security lighting, extra-strong doors or window grills. It is those pensioners that we need to support, and I am pleased that the Government are helping people to be more secure in their own homes and providing better street lighting so that old people can feel more comfortable in their community. All those issues are part of pensioner poverty, but the Government are tackling them and making provisions to help elderly people.

As I said, there is still a great deal to be done to erase pensioner poverty. In 1980, the Tories cut the link between pensions and wages, and single pensioners suffered a loss of £22 a week. After the 17 years of Tory rule that followed the severing of that link, the reduced quality of life of many of our pensioners is apparent, and the Government must take action. I am pleased that they are reviewing future pension provision and keeping the promise that they made to the people. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam referred to the Green Paper on pension reform.

We must at all times remember that today's pensioners contributed a percentage of their earnings to their pension, but the pension does not relate to earnings. In comparison with today's rates of income from investment, the rate of return on those pension contributions is poor, particularly when we consider the number of years for which people paid into the pension scheme. Rich people tend to get more out of what they have paid in because they live longer than poor pensioners. With means-tested benefits, the pensioners who have saved more lose out.

The state pension is about 15 per cent. of average earnings, and that percentage is falling because wages are increasing. Between 5 and 6 per cent. of the UK's gross domestic product is paid in pensions. Pensioners in many European Union countries receive around 15 per cent. of GDP.

In the two years during which the Government have been in power, they have done more to eradicate pensioner poverty than the Tories did in 18 years. I plead with the House and the country never to let a Government come to power who will attack pensioners as the Tories did in their 18 years in power. The Government are on track to eradicate pensioner poverty, and I offer my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Minister of State and the rest of the Government on their work for pensioners over the past two years.

10.3 am

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on securing time for this debate. I am pleased to take part because the issue is important for many thousands of our constituents.

Poverty among the elderly is probably worse in Wales than anywhere else in the UK. In my constituency, 22 per cent. of the Meirionnydd section of the population are elderly, retired people. In the Conwy valley, that proportion is as high as 26 per cent. Thankfully, people are living to a greater age, so the proportion of elderly people is set to increase for the foreseeable future. Life expectancy for a woman in Wales is 79 and, for a man, 74. By 2016, there will be approximately 696,000 pensioners in Wales, and about 9 per cent. of the population will be over 75. That figure is 14 per cent. higher than that expected for England.

According to Shelter Cymru, at present, 60 per cent. of pensioners in Wales live on or below the poverty line. In Wales, a majority of pensioners rely on state pensions and other state benefits as their principal source of income. In 1997, 79,000 pensioners were receiving income support. It is estimated that a further 55,000 to 71,000 elderly people who are eligible for income support did not claim their benefits. Also in 1997, 13,700 disabled pensioners and 2,700 widows were in receipt of war pensions.

In that year, the average household in Wales spent £14 a week, or 7 per cent. of its income, on fuel, light and power. Single pensioners who are dependent on a state pension spent between £7.60 and £8.40 a week on lighting, fuel and power, while those not dependent on state pensions spent between £9.30 and £16.20 on those items.

The number of unfit homes occupied in Wales is about twice as high as that in England. Wales has the worst housing stock in western Europe if the age of the housing stock is used as an indicator. Over one third of the houses were constructed before 1919, and 52 per cent. of older people in Wales live in pre-1919 dwellings.

Since older people tend to be concerned about owing money and sliding into debt, I often come across people who choose to prioritise their spending as best they can, frequently choosing between eating and heating. Is that how we shall treat old people? They have, after all, given us a good start in life and a reasonable standard of living. We owe it to them to treat them better.

It is a long-standing indictment of successive Governments that so many hard-working, honest and decent people have been pushed below the poverty line. One of the reasons for that is that Baroness Thatcher's Administration decoupled state pensions from the average rise in wages and imposed the softer option of price inflation. That has meant that, in real terms, the value of retirement pensions has slipped back considerably over the past 15 years, and that is why there is such a shameful disparity between what pensioners receive and what they should receive. The situation appears far worse when one compares the UK's retirement pension with other European examples.

Pensioners in rural Wales often have to bear the brunt of petrol price rises. Although the Government say that they will introduce free or reduced price travel for pensioners, they will have to leave that measure to local authorities, which cannot, at present, make ends meet to pay for it. I should welcome a full and honest commitment to introduce centrally funded free transport for all pensioners.

Recently, two of my constituents, Mr. Arthur Holland Williams and Mrs. Jenny Hyde, both of Blaenau Ffestiniog—that should give *Hansard* something to think about—came to see me at my advice surgery. They were speaking out on behalf of many other pensioners in the constituency. Mr. Williams told me that the net effect of the Government's recent pension increases has given him an extra 38p a week. His story is similar to many thousands of others. We ought to remember, at a time when water rates in Wales are crippling, and every outgoing, such as electricity standing charges, fuel, transport and food, is racing upwards, that 38p a week does not even buy a cup of coffee.

A few weeks ago, a pensioner wrote an anonymous letter to me in which he told me off most severely for criticising the Budget. Perhaps when he realises that he is less than 40p a week better off, he will understand what I meant by saying that the Budget was really a poor one—all smoke and mirrors and a spin doctor's triumph.

The Budget is hardly as generous as it seems. The basic minimum income guarantee is extended only to those who claim income support. As I said, it is estimated that between 55,000 and 71,000 pensioners in Wales are entitled to income support but do not claim it. Furthermore, those people who are just above income support levels gain nothing from that new income. There is a 7 per cent. increase in council tax and an increase in the price of fuel and other utilities, so that increase has already been cancelled out. Age Concern, for example, says that, on balance, it would prefer a Budget that helps pensioners by making a generous increase in the basic state pension. That is the crux of the whole matter.

Mr. Williams and Mrs. Hyde, to whom I referred, gave me the following figures relating to a neighbour of theirs, whose outgoings I shall briefly detail. They are as follows: rent, £1,371.76 per annum; water rates, £254.25; council tax, £361.81; telephone, £240; electricity, £210; coal and gas, £523.08; clothing and other items, £260; food and cleaning materials, £1,300; television licence and piping service, £320.24, and household and personal insurance, £185. That is a grand total of £5,026.14. The state pension is £4,464.02, which means a deficit of £562.12. Even working out a very careful and meagre budget, and despite what one could hardly call high living, that person still has a shortfall. She hardly has a lavish life style. She must avoid buying any kind of luxury and is desperately worried about sliding into debt. Her health is being affected by the worry, and that example is typical of many cases that I have come across over the past few months.

The treatment of our pensioners is downright unfair, and that is something that I greatly resent. At a time when they should be enjoying life, having made a great contribution to our comforts, pensioners are desperately worried about making ends meet. On Monday, I met a constituent who was widowed in 1983. Her late husband was an acquaintance of mine. He was a hard-working man who was as conscientious as they come. Sadly—it was a great blow to everyone in the Bala area who knew him—he died of an industrial disease. His widow is being paid £66.75 a week in industrial benefits, which is the lowest rate of income support. Her only other means of support is a retirement pension of £38.77. She is in dire straits and unable to make ends meet. She pleads with the Government to do something.

I appreciate what the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) said about the efforts being made and the pledges being given, but nothing much is changing on the ground. It is a grave injustice that the lady to whom I referred not only lost the companionship of her husband in 1983 but—after all that he and, indeed, she, suffered—is paid the lowest rate possible. I shall be writing to the Minister about the case to seek more and proper explanations and, better still, I hope, some changes.

The time has surely come to stop tinkering with pensions and to stop hiding behind the elusive £1 excess income, which deprives people of benefit. Surely the time has come to overhaul and simplify the system to ensure that pensions are substantially increased. I welcome some of the Government's proposals, but they are merely tinkering at the edges. We should be considering abolishing utility standing charges for the elderly and ensuring that pensioners' means are taken into account when calling for the payment of council tax and water charges. There are many more things that could be done to improve the quality of life of our elderly citizens. I am angry and ashamed, as I am sure many other hon. Members are, about a system which cuts taxes for the well-off but denies the elderly the decent standard of living that they richly deserve.

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

I conclude by quoting from a report entitled "The Financial Situations of Older People in Wales" by Age Concern Cymru, Help the Aged and the Welsh Consumer Council. The report concludes:

"It is said that a society is judged by the way it treats its young and its old: if this is the case then the treatment of older people in Wales and Britain as a whole reflects very badly on the British state and British society. While notions of poverty are subjective in many respects it is objectively evident that older people in Britain are the poor relations of the European Union—they deserve more."

I fully agree with those words.

10.14 am

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on securing this debate and providing hon. Members with an opportunity to draw attention to various matters of concern. We must be aware of the context in which this debate is taking place, and I join my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) in congratulating the Government on doing more than any Government in recent history, and certainly more than the previous Government, to alleviate pensioner poverty. It is telling that there is not a single Conservative Back Bencher present for this debate.

I shall save time by not dwelling on the benefits that the Government have introduced, some of which have already been mentioned: the reduction of value-added tax on fuel, the universal winter fuel payments, the minimum income guarantee, tax allowances which take another 200,000 pensioners out of taxation—on top of the two thirds who already pay no tax—free eye tests, moves towards more and universal concessionary travel and many others which my hon. Friend the Minister will perhaps mention. Let us not forget that the Government have already made enormous advances in alleviating pensioner poverty, but I want to draw attention to some remaining concerns, make some appeals and perhaps offer advice to the Government as to how they might target future action further to alleviate pensioner poverty.

One concern is that the gap will continue to widen between pensioners and the rest of the population. It has already been pointed out that although the minimum income guarantee will now rise in line with earnings, for which we are grateful, the basic state pension will continue to be linked to inflation.

I am concerned to ensure that future pensioners should be allowed what I call, although it is not my own term, active ageing. That means being allowed to enjoy health and mobility and, indeed, in their pre-retirement years, employment which allows them to make provision for their old age. My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton mentioned access to information and entertainment in connection with the television licence.

The minimum income guarantee is welcome, but there are well-known concerns about it. It causes much confusion among older people, many of whom think that it is the same as the state pension, when of course it is not. More than 1 million pensioners do not get the minimum income guarantee—700,000 of them because, as the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam said, they do not claim the income support to which they are entitled. A further 600,000 do not receive it because they have savings in excess of £3,000.

In that connection, I remind my hon. Friend the Minister of an answer he gave on 13 April to a question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). My right hon. Friend asked how much it would cost to buy an annuity now which would give an income equal to the state pension

"in 15 years' time, assuming that the basic pension is raised in line with prices, the minimum income guarantee is raised in line with earnings"

and so on. The answer was that it would cost

"£15,000 in 1999 earnings terms, or £19,000 in 1999 prices"

to purchase an annuity now which would provide

"an income equivalent to the difference between the basic State pension and the Minimum Income Guarantee". —[*Official Report*, 15 April 1999; Vol. 329, c. *151*.]

I remind my hon. Friend that 600,000 pensioners are not entitled to the MIG because they have savings in excess of only £3,000. I ask the Government to bear that in mind.

Age Concern conducted a survey of pensioners and health. There is certainly a perception among pensioners that there is discrimination on grounds of age in some parts of the national health service. Ill health is expensive and contributes to poverty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton said much that needed to be said on the question of mobility and about the need to provide the transport for which increased concessionary travel will be available. I remind the Minister that many old people have large cars because of their disability—for example, they may need to transport a wheelchair—but they cannot claim the new concession on vehicle excise duty. Also, if they have large cars, they suffer from the increase in the price of petrol above the rate of inflation every year. There may be ways in which pensioners can be helped with that problem.

With regard to employment, I mentioned that if people lose their jobs in the years leading up to old age, they lose the opportunity to prepare for old age. The Government must intervene actively where necessary to help older people into employment. It is pleasing that the new deal is now taking account of people over 50.

I shall deal briefly with other concerns. Some older people will be taxed at 20 per cent., even though they fall within the 10 per cent. tax band, because the tax on savings will not be reduced. In addition, the Minister will be aware of the long, hard campaign that I and others have waged on the issue of reclaiming tax credit on dividends.

The abolition of the widows bereavement allowance particularly affects older widows. The abolition of tax relief on new home income plans reduces the opportunity for some older people to realise capital tied up in their houses to increase income.

I have an early-day motion on the Order Paper today drawing attention to the fiasco of the 1986 decision to reduce to 50 per cent. widows' and widowers' entitlement to inherit SERPS. That decision was not publicised by the Department, so between 1986 and 1999 pensioners have been planning for the future on the basis of wrong information. I appeal to the Government to sort out that mess as quickly as possible.

The overall picture shows some darts well aimed by the Government. Much help has been given to all pensioners, and much more immediate help to the most needy, but more needs to be done in future Budgets. Millions of

responsible, deserving pensioners are penalised by an array of relatively small losses as a result of recent taxation measures.

The Chancellor has shown himself to be imaginative and generous in his targeting of fiscal policies. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to use his influence with the Chancellor so that in future Budgets my right hon. Friend will take corrective action where he has room for generosity. If that is done, I look forward to seeing more darts on the dart board, hitting the bull's-eye and the double top, bringing about the secure old age that current and future pensioners deserve. Let us not forget that all the benefits of prosperity that we enjoy have already been contributed to and paid for by current pensioners and pensioners soon to come.

10.24 am

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) is to be warmly congratulated by the House on having seized the initiative and secured the debate on such a timely issue, which is of immediate concern to millions of our fellow citizens.

We have had an extremely interesting debate. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) produced numerous facts and figures. It was useful for our debate to be informed by precise information and by the personal cases of the hon. Gentleman's constituents. It is a fundamental task of this place properly to reflect our constituents' view of the world. The hon. Gentleman made an excellent speech.

We heard some extremely interesting remarks from the hon. Members for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara). There were the ritual genuflections to their own Front Bench, a few nasty things said about the Tories and a few quotes from the latest Millbank tower handout, but the broad thrust of their contributions was a damning critique of the Government's actions or inaction in respect of older and retired people: inaction in the case of concessionary television licences, buses—a matter that the hon. Member for Normanton was right to raise—and age discrimination in various cases cited by the hon. Member for Knowsley, South.

I was particularly struck by what the hon. Gentleman said about age discrimination in the job market and in the national health service. I introduced a private Member's Bill on that subject in the previous Parliament. The Labour party made a number of commitments before the last election. During parliamentary questions last November, the Prime Minister made a commitment to me to legislate on the matter, but, so far, nothing has been done. The indictment of the Government's inaction is well deserved.

The hon. Members for Normanton and for Knowsley, South were even more critical of the Government's failure to restore the earnings link, which was the thrust of the Labour party's propaganda in opposition, and of the Government's great extension of means-testing.

There was a good joke this morning from the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam. I am sure that it was a deliberate joke; it was certainly very amusing. The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Treasury had consulted the Department of Social Security about the Budget. I have been in my present job for only a few months, but that is long enough to realise that the Treasury does not consult the Department of Social Security about anything—the Treasury gives orders to the Department.

Policy on matters such as pensions and welfare is made entirely in the Treasury. The Benefits Agency hands out the money in the country, and the only role of the Minister of State and his ministerial colleagues is to defend the indefensible in the House and elsewhere. That is an unenviable role and some of us might consider it unedifying as well, but that is the role in which they have allowed themselves to be cast. Let us have no doubt about who is calling the shots on policy.

There is profound concern among retired people and those approaching retirement for all the reasons that have emerged during the debate. People are wondering what is going on. The answer is that the Government are engaged in making colossal fools of older and retired people. Before the last election and for many years previously, all the propaganda suggested that Labour would restore the earnings link. I had that thrown at me at public meetings and on the doorstep during the election campaign. Millions of people voted for the Labour party in that expectation and the Government have defaulted on it.

The Labour party has always shared with us scepticism about means testing. During my time in the House, I have heard eloquent and persuasive speeches from Labour Members about the unfairness of means testing and the damage that it does to a sense of social responsibility and to the incentive to save. Perhaps the Government had a secret agenda, but no one was prepared for what has happened. There has been the most colossal extension of means testing since the 1930s. The worst aspect has been the extension of that to pensioners.

Most extraordinarily, the Chancellor declared as recently as 1993 at the Labour party conference:

> "I want the next Labour Government to achieve what in 50 years of the Welfare State has never been achieved. The end of the means test for our elderly people".

In fact, as I said, he has brought about the most colossal increase in means testing for elderly people since the 1930s, of which the Government should be thoroughly ashamed.

Mr. Rendel: Will the hon. Gentleman therefore confirm that the Conservatives will make it their official policy to agree with the Liberal Democrats that an extra £3 should be given to over 75-year-olds and an extra £5 to over 80-year-olds, which will reduce means-testing?

Mr. Davies: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that, where the country can afford it, it is absolutely right to increase the state retirement pension, for which people have paid through their national insurance contributions, and not to discriminate particularly invidiously against people with small savings or to extend means testing. That has been quite the wrong approach. We shall propose our own policies for the next election—and for the next Government—which will be diametrically opposed to the direction in which the Labour party has been taking us over the past two years. I give that assurance unambiguously and clearly.

As if that were not enough, the Government have used the tax system to discriminate against retired people and those with small savings in a way that would have been

[Mr. Davies]

quite unimaginable—indeed was so until it happened. The Government have found a way of forcing people who are below the income tax threshold on their aggregate income to pay 20 per cent. tax on their small savings income. That particularly impacts on small savers and retired people.

I understand that, as a result of the Government's vicious decision to force people whose total income is under the threshold that Parliament has fixed—below which people should not pay any tax on their income—to pay tax, 300,000 non-taxpaying pensioners and a further 330,000 non-taxpayers will lose an average of £75 a year each, and 80,000 pensioners will lose more than £100 a year, and they can ill afford that. That is utterly unforgivable. The Government have cynically done that—perhaps in the belief that retired and older people are so stupid that they will not realise what is going on. If that is what the Government think, they have another think coming.

With a great many bells and whistles, it was announced in the Budget that we would have a new 10p starting rate of income tax, but we were not told that it would not apply to savings income. So, those who have retired, and therefore do not have earned income—they may have very modest savings—will not benefit from the 10p rate. That is vicious discrimination against savers in general, and retired people in particular. If the Government do not think that the country will notice, they are in for a very nasty shock.

This is a Government who are all positive rhetoric and no positive substance. The real substance, such as it is, has been thoroughly negative—certainly for the retired and elderly sections of our population over the past two years. I dread to think where retired people, particularly those on modest incomes who have small savings, will find themselves at the end of four years if we continue as we have over the past two

10.34 am

Mr. John Cryer (Hornchurch): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on securing this important debate. I wonder where all the Tory Members are. The words of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) ring a little hollow, given the empty Benches behind him.

All hon. Members have referred to their constituencies in this debate. Both my constituency of Hornchurch and the borough of Havering have a very high proportion of pensioners. Like other hon. Members, I see pensioners in my surgeries and meet them in the street, and they write to me and call me, so I feel able to represent their views quite effectively.

The biggest complaint that I receive undoubtedly concerns the reliance on means testing. Without any shadow of doubt, the Government have moved in the right direction. The Budget was marginally redistributive. The cut in value added tax on fuel was important, although, personally, I would have abolished it completely. Free eye tests are also important, as is the minimum income guarantee.

However, the number of people who are dependent on means-tested benefits, particularly income support, is generally rising. In my constituency, the number of pensioners in privately rented accommodation who are dependent on income support is 500. The number who are council tenants is nearly 2,000. That is unacceptably high.

I know that the Government and my hon. Friend the Minister have often said that their principal aim on pensions is to remove reliance on means testing. I read the pensions Green Paper when it was released a short time ago, and have some specific questions about exactly how the state second pension—the replacement for the state earnings-related pension scheme—and the stakeholder pension will work.

The Green Paper claims that, as a result of the state second pension, there will be enormous increases over SERPS for low-income earners when they retire, but does not explain exactly how that will work. I would be interested in knowing the exact mechanism for guaranteeing such increases. Where will the savings and investment come from? What kind of figures are we talking about? How many pensioners will the state second pension remove from reliance on income support? I would be very interested in that, given the constituency that I represent. What time scale will apply to the state second pension? How soon will pensioners start to benefit from it?

I worked in the pensions industry during the 1980s as an underwriter, and saw the mis-selling. "Mis-selling" is just a euphemism; what took place was fraud—with the previous Government's blessing, by the way. Having seen that, I cannot envisage how the figures will stack up in the stakeholder pension scheme. There will be no compulsion, or even pressure, to ensure that employers contribute or help to set up the schemes, and that is the vital missing part. If the schemes are to be successful, there must ultimately be some compulsion on employers to take part and contribute to them.

I do not know how low-income workers will be able to contribute sufficiently to stakeholder schemes to give them a decent income when they retire. Such schemes generally concern people not on very low incomes, but on relatively low incomes. What actuarial analysis lies behind the potential stakeholder schemes?

I should like the Government to move toward the type of nationwide occupational schemes in Australia, which force employers to contribute and to take part in setting up the schemes. Even if we moved towards that, the problems on retirement of the very poorest pensioners and wage-earners would not be solved. I have always believed that the answer for the poorest pensioners and lowest wage-earners is ultimately the national state pension, to which we all contribute throughout our lives. That must be the saviour for the poorest pensioners. As many hon. Members have pointed out, if the increases in the state pension had been in line with earnings, and not just prices, since the link with earnings was abolished in 1981, the lowest pension would be about £90, rather than the current pretty miserly one.

As I said, the biggest complaint made by pensioners who come to my surgery is about means-testing. There is an almost visceral dislike of means testing among pensioners, which is entirely understandable. The Government have launched many schemes to find out why pensioners are not taking up their entitlement to income support. About 700,000 pensioners refuse to do so.

I can answer those questions for the Government, without using any schemes. The last thing that people want—certainly those in my constituency who might have

worked on the docks all their lives, been through the war and perhaps brought up a large family in difficult circumstances—is to have to go down to the Department of Social Security office to be patronised by someone half their age, patted on the head and told that they can have something to which they should be entitled in the first place. That leads to bitter, deep and long-standing resentment among pensioners.

We should be moving towards universal benefits that are available to everybody and, effectively, abolition of means testing. I would like greater emphasis to be placed on that.

10.40 am

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): It is a pleasure to take part in a debate on this important subject. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) has campaigned very hard on this issue, and I congratulate him on securing the debate. It is also a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer), who raised issues relating to employers being required to put money into stakeholder schemes and made some telling points. I hope that the Minister will respond to them. There may be less pension provision, not more, if employers start opting out of occupational schemes, into which they are putting money, and run stakeholder schemes instead.

In the few minutes available to me, I shall address primarily the future of pensioner poverty—where are we headed? However, a comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam prompts me to remark briefly on where we are now. I asked the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to say what proportion of pensioners in different age bands—on his definition, not on mine—were living in fuel poverty, which is spending more than 10 per cent. of income on fuel. The figures for younger pensioners were frightening enough, but the figure for households headed by a pensioner aged over 80 was 80 per cent.

That figure for such households was reached through the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' definition of fuel poverty and its own figures. It shows the problem that we face and highlights our particular concern about older pensioners. However, I want principally to address our tomorrow—indeed, all our tomorrows, in 2020 or 2050. Where are we headed?

The Government have said that we start from a situation in which one pensioner in four is dependent not on means-tested benefits, but on income support alone. Hundreds of thousands more receive rent rebates, council tax benefit and so on, but 1.5 million pensioners out of about 6 million pensioner benefit units receive income support. The Government tell us that, on unchanged policies, that figure will be one in three in 2050, but the pensioner population will rise over that period and that figure will increase to 3.5 million pensioners, compared with 1.5 million today.

The Government also say that we need not worry because, if the Green Paper proposals are implemented, the figure will be one in four—but one in four of a bigger pensioner population, or 2.5 million pensioners. The Government say that, if they introduce their policies—leaving aside the possibility that lots more people will suddenly save, and assuming that a mass savings habit does not suddenly start—the figure will still be one in four, but 2.5 million pensioners will be receiving income support instead of 1.5 million. That figure also leaves aside all the other means-tested benefits.

If I were about to write a pensions policy for the next 50 years, I would not consider an extra million pensioners receiving income support in 50 years, when the whole blasted scheme was working, to be a triumph. I would consider that a failure. The Government say in response, "But we are trying to encourage more people to save for their old age, through stakeholder schemes." I am sure that stakeholder schemes will overcome some of the barriers that people face under the personal pension regime, but there is real danger that, because of the Government's commitment to link the minimum income guarantee to earnings—I reiterate my support for that—the yawning gap between the basic pension and the poverty line will discourage people from saving.

It has been suggested that an annuity of between £15,000 and £20,000 would fill the current gap between the basic pension and the income support line, but that gap will grow quickly—not in line with prices or earnings, but faster than both. The gap between an item linked to prices and an item indexed to earnings rises faster than both; the simple arithmetic tells us that. The annuity that people would need to buy to fill that gap—the stakeholder pension pot—would rise exponentially, which would discourage people from saving.

I believe that the Minister genuinely wants to do something about pensioner poverty and that he cares about poor pensioners. For those who receive it, the minimum income guarantee will be of great value. A crucial issue, therefore, is non-take-up. In its election manifesto, the Labour party used the available figures and said that 1 million pensioners did not claim their income support. It has since emerged that there was a statistical blunder: that was not the Government's fault; they did not know that the figure was wrong. We hear that the figure is between 400,000 and 700,000; I ask the Minister to go back to his civil servants and demand proper figures now.

I have asked for details of those 400,000 to 700,000 pensioners: for example, how many of them are older pensioners? That is germane to assessing the validity of our strategy for helping older pensioners. I am told that I will have to wait for those details until May, when we will finally get some take-up figures. They will be three or four years out of date.

I used to be involved in constructing such statistics. One error made those figures wrong: the Government missed out private widows' pensions when they were working out people's incomes. I do not see why it should take four or five months to put that error right. Parliament is being denied proper information on a key issue for evaluating the Government's pensions policy.

The Government are relying heavily on means testing. Even if the figure is one in four in 2050, it will represent 2.5 million people; if it is one in five, it will represent 2 million people. That is a serious amount of means testing. A crucial aspect of assessing that policy is whether take-up is a big problem. It is shocking that we do not have proper information. I hope that the Minister will go back to his Department and get us proper information.

I want to raise a final point about the future of pensioner poverty. Let us assume that Government policy is introduced; although a mass savings habit does not

[Mr. Steve Webb]

develop, there is no mass desertion from saving and we end up with a figure of one in four, which is an average over all pensioners, from those aged 65 to those in the oldest age groups. What will be the proportion for the over-80s or the over-85s? It will not be one in four because we know that the newly retired are, on average, much better off than the very elderly. The figure may be one in four for all pensioners, but perhaps one in six or one in seven for the newly retired. What would it be for the very elderly—one in two?

If half the people in our country aged over 80 end up on means-tested benefits after 50 years of a bright, shiny new pensions policy, what will have been the point of it? By then, people aged 80 may still have 10 years of life left, on average. If the Government will not put pensions up across the board, which would be expensive, can we not do something to make sure that those people at least do not have to fill in means-tested benefit forms every year, with us hoping that they will claim, when they reach extreme old age?

The Minister is a reasonable man, and I shall sit down now to allow him as much time as possible to respond.

10.47 am

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): I too congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on his success in securing the debate. I was pleased to hear that he is a regular attender at meetings of the older people's forum his constituency. I commend that to the House; it is important that Members listen to what older people say. I will say a little more about how the Government are listening to older people and I hope that the hon. Gentleman's practice will be taken up much more widely.

The complete absence of Conservative Back-Bench Members is striking and telling, as a number of contributors have said. This is the International Year of Older People, whose slogan is "A Society for All Ages", and it is appropriate that we are having this important debate at a relatively early stage of it.

There have been big changes in the structure of the economy during the past 50 years. Traditional industries have declined and working patterns are very different. During that period of immense social change, spending on social security has moved inexorably upwards. Despite the increase in spending, poverty and inequality have increased—in particular, for pensioners. The average pensioner income has risen sharply over the past 20 years, due largely to the success of occupational pensions, which I welcome, but a large number of people have not shared in the benefits of that rise.

The best-off 20 per cent. of pensioners have an income that is, in real terms, 70 per cent. higher than in 1979. The figure for the least well off 20 per cent. is only 30 per cent. There has been a huge rise in inequality among pensioners, and hon. Members were right to draw attention to that. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) provided some interesting figures on the position in Wales.

Addressing that inequality requires fundamental reform of the pensions system. Our pensions Green Paper, which was published before Christmas, sets out our strategy for reform. It is based on the principle that everybody who can save for their retirement has a responsibility to do so. In turn, the Government have a responsibility to provide security in retirement for those who cannot save enough, and to regulate the pensions system effectively.

We want to put pensions on a sound footing, so that every pensioner is assured of a decent income in retirement and people can rely on secure and effective private pensions. We want to deliver security for today's pensioners and peace of mind for tomorrow's.

I want to focus most of my remarks on today's pensioners, but my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer) and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) raised important questions about the future of pension provision, so I shall respond briefly to those points. Our proposals are based on four interlinked pillars.

First, we had a manifesto commitment to uprate the basic state pension annually at least in line with prices, and we have honoured that commitment as we have all our others. The basic state pension will not be means-tested and will not be privatised. Secondly, the minimum income guarantee, delivered through income support, will provide an income floor below which no pensioner without savings will fall, and we aim to uprate the level of that guarantee over time in line with earnings. Thirdly, the state second pension will ensure that everybody who has worked and contributed throughout their lives—allowing, for the first time, for periods out of work caring for a disabled person or bringing up children below the age of five, and for periods out of work through long-term disability—will have an income on retirement above the minimum income guarantee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch asked for more details about how that will work. Under the state second pension, anyone who has earned in lifetime earnings less than £9,000 a year will be treated as if they had earned £9,000. In addition, the accrual rate for someone at the £9,000 point will be twice as much as it would have been under the state earnings-related pension scheme. I hope that it is clear from that explanation that, for people earning above the lower earnings limit and below £9,000, and for those earning rather more than £9,000, the state second pension represents a significant improvement on what is available under SERPS. It should come into effect in 2002 and, to gain the whole benefit of that, a person would have to have spent his whole working life in the state second pension. As with everything to do with pensions, it will take a long time for the full benefit to work through. I think that my hon. Friend will recognise that we are proposing a substantial improvement.

The fourth pillar is stakeholder pension schemes, which will provide people for whom no suitable funded scheme is now available with good value, reliable, funded pensions, which will benefit from higher levels of national insurance rebate than are currently available. There are large numbers of such people. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch, let me say that employers will be required to give access to a stakeholder scheme under our proposals. We will not require employers to contribute to them, although some are considering doing so.

That approach has been widely welcomed, and we are now analysing more than 550 responses to the Green Paper. However, the central point in this debate is that

there are millions of existing pensioners for whom those reforms will come too late and who need help now to enjoy their retirement. We are determined to do more to help those who need it most. We have taken action to help all pensioners while giving priority to the least well-off, who are the central concern in this debate.

We have announced a £2 billion a year package for today's pensioners. From this month, income support rates for eligible pensioners will increase by three times the rate of inflation to give a minimum income guarantee for pensioners who are entitled to income support of £75 a week for a single person and £116 for a couple. As a result, pensioners receiving income support will be at least £160 better off in real terms in the coming year, and 65,000 pensioners not previously entitled to claim income support because they have been just above the threshold—a point made by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy—will for the first time be able to do so and enjoy the benefits of the higher level of minimum income guarantee.

In April next year, the guarantee will be increased in line with earnings. That will help to ensure that even the least well-off pensioners are able to share in rising national prosperity. From that month, a further 20,000 will become entitled and so benefit from the guarantee.

The guarantee is being set at a higher level for older pensioners. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam referred to the needs of older pensioners. Given the earnings-related rise, from this month, the rate will be £125.30 for couples one or both of whom is over 80, and we expect that rate to increase by another £5 per week next April. So, next year, an older pensioner couple on income support is likely to be more than £600 a year better off in real terms over this two-year period. Those are substantial gains for the least well-off pensioners—those on income support. We are proposing a series of well-aimed darts, to use the term of my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara).

Mr. Burstow: Hon. Members have drawn attention to the fact that 700,000 pensioners are not taking up their entitlement to income support. I hope that the Minister will say something about the Government's pilot projects, because that is an important matter. Those well-aimed darts are not hitting their targets, because those pensioners are not getting the benefits.

Mr. Timms: One and a half million pensioner households certainly are receiving the benefits. However, the hon. Gentleman is right: this is an important issue. Last year, we commissioned new research into the reasons why up to 700,000 pensioners are not submitting claims. We set up pilot projects to examine new ways of identifying potential recipients and how best to encourage them to claim. We are now examining the results as they emerge, and we are planning our next steps. I hope to be able to tell the House more about that in due course.

However, we are left with the problem of pensioners with low incomes and modest savings that are just above the savings limits for income support. They see little benefit from the effort that they have made to save for their old age, and we do not think that that is right. People should feel that it is worth while to save, and we want them to do so. That is why we said in the Green Paper that we want to examine ways in which we can better reward those who have saved for their retirement. We have consulted on that and we are analysing the responses. We shall announce our proposals for change later in this Parliament.

The Budget made substantial changes to improve the tax position of pensioners. The income tax personal allowance for pensioners aged between 65 and 74 rose by £310, which is £130 more than the normal indexation. Other changes were made for people aged over 75. As a result of those substantial changes, 200,000 pensioners will be taken out of income tax. Two thirds of pensioners will not pay any tax at all.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam asked me to talk about long-term care. We are addressing that complex issue. The report of the royal commission was published at the beginning of March, and we are considering it carefully. Yesterday, I spoke to one of the commissioners, Claire Rayner. I am unable to say when that response will be published, but we are considering the matter urgently.

The inter-ministerial group on older people, which I chair, has commissioned wide-ranging research on older people's attitudes and aspirations. It has focused on active ageing as one of the major themes—to pick up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South. We are also focusing on the importance of consultation. During the year, we are having a series of "listening to older people" events, jointly organised by non-governmental organisations, to support the United Nations International Year of Older Persons. There will be about 10 events, and all 15 of my fellow Ministers on the inter-ministerial group will be taking part in one or more of them. We want to know what older people want from the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We must now move to the next debate.

Park Homes

11 am

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I am delighted to have had the good fortune to secure this debate—I expect that the Chamber will be packed to the rafters before long—and to have the chance to air the problems and, indeed, opportunities involved in park home living as it affects my constituents on some 1,000 pitches in 47 parks in the district of Wyre, as it affects some 200,000 people in the United Kingdom, and as it affects older people living in rural areas. That last category is quite relevant to the earlier debate.

It is, I suppose, the inevitable fate of Governments coming to power after a hiatus of 18 years to be faced with problems that should have been resolved years earlier, which have been compounded over time, and which have been sorely neglected for so long that people have despaired of their ever being sorted out. I doubt, however, whether many problems discussed in the House have involved such a basic difficulty in regard to definition. Nowhere in the legislation—which is sorely inadequate for the purpose of providing all park home owners with the security and consideration that most of us take for granted—is there so much as a definition of "park home".

The Mobile Homes Act 1983, the Caravan Sites Act 1968 and the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 contain no better definition than that contained in housing booklet 30, "Mobile Homes", published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. It states:

"The legal definition of a mobile home is the same as that for a caravan. Broadly speaking, it covers any structure designed or adapted for people to live in which is capable of being moved from one place to another (whether by being towed or by being transported on a motor vehicle or trailer). This does not include railway stock on a railway line which is in use, nor tents. It does include twin units separately constructed and designed for assembly on site, provided that the twin unit is physically capable of being moved when assembled. The twin unit must be no more than 60 foot long 20 foot wide and the living accommodation no more than 10 foot high."

I am glad that we are not discussing tents, but we should not really be discussing caravans either. I think that we should scrap all references to caravans and mobile homes when referring to park homes in residential parks that have planning permission for 365 days a year. We should be discussing housing needs, housing resources, housing law and housing policy. I do not propose to talk about holiday parks in which people often live for 11 months of the year. Although they give rise to serious anomalies and problems that will need to be dealt with in the future, our first priority must be to deal with residential parks.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): The hon. Gentleman mentioned holiday homes. People who obtain mobile homes often have to sign a document containing the word "holiday", and are not aware what that means. Many authorities are able to turn such people away from sites. The Government should tackle the problem. The word "holiday" should not be taken into consideration when people sign deeds or other documents relating to mobile homes.

Mr. Dawson: I commend the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue, and I share his concern. Personally, I feel that the issues relating to holiday parks are even more complex than those involving residential parks; but, before we do anything else, it is in the interests of all who live in any structure covered by mobile home or caravan legislation for us to clarify at least the residential aspect.

Park homes are not caravans. Usually, they are mobile only once, when they are installed, as I learned when I first visited a park home. Park homes are delivered—often to delightful rural locations—as prefabricated units; but once they have been installed with mains services bricked in, capable of being extended, adapted and reroofed, of having their insulation improved and, in principle, of being completely replaced part by part over time, they can hardly be described as mobile. They are homes, some valued at under £10,000 but others costing as much as £100,000. They are sited in parks owned by others, for which a pitch fee is paid, but they are still homes, which can provide a very comfortable, pleasant way of life—especially for older and semi-retired people who want a quiet existence.

Two of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Ward of Wyre Vale park and Lodge park in my constituency, are *Park Home and Holiday Caravan* magazine's park owners of 1999. I am told by my constituents in Cabus and Catterall that they provide two splendid, safe, secure parks for older people. They have made a serious long-term investment in their parks, enabling them to develop high standards and excellent relationships with park residents in attractive surroundings. They plainly have a good, expanding business, for their parks are permanently full. News of impending vacancies is conveyed by word of mouth rather than advertisement. They intend to be around for a long time, and good luck to them.

Unfortunately, however, park home living is not all like that. I am hardly an expert on the subject; until about three years ago, I had never heard of park homes. But one day when I was campaigning in Poulton-Le-Fylde, I got talking to someone who had a story to tell. As a result, we decided to get together with some other people and hold a public meeting. We booked a room for 25. Given that it was a warm summer evening in Garstang, and that the subject was aimed at older, retired people who presumably would be keen on a quiet life, I expected half a dozen people to turn up; in fact, 72 turned up.

We ended up outside, in a grassy area, holding an impromptu meeting at which I heard tale after tale of people made vulnerable by age and infirmity who, having invested their life savings in park homes in isolated rural surroundings, had been verbally abused by park owners and their staff. They had been encouraged to move on so that the owners could claim a 10 per cent. commission on a sale. Annual pitch fee increases way above the rate of inflation had been imposed on them with no negotiation or discussion. Their parks, in which they lived and in which they had invested money—often their life savings—had been redesigned without consultation. Park owners had undermined their ability to sell their own property, and had then offered to buy it themselves for a much lower price. I have heard of inadequate electricity supplies—whereby putting on a kettle at the wrong time blew the electricity supply of the entire site—and of cases in which parks' physical standards were poor, and sometimes dangerous. I have also heard of cases in which attempts at building a residents association, to start a

reasonable dialogue, were constantly thwarted and undermined, and in which people were unsure of their rights, confused, angry and afraid.

Subsequently, we had a succession of meetings. As soon as we received publicity, I started receiving letters from people across the country who were concerned about the issue. We organised a local conference to put people in touch with some excellent residents associations, such as the National Association of Park Home Residents, the British Park Home Residents Association and, perhaps above all, the Independent Park Home Advisory Service. We then went to meet Lord Graham—who I contend knows more about park homes than all the Members of this place and the other place put together. He has campaigned on the issue for years, and is held in great respect everywhere.

Spurred on by all that encouragement, we started to talk to the listening and progressive council leader—Councillor Richard Anyon—of Wyre borough council, which was quick to develop its practice on the matter. The council produced an information booklet for local park home residents, began to give more attention to site licences and pioneered home insulation schemes for park home residents. However, although a great amount of work is continuing at local level, that work is a mere drop in the ocean of painstaking casework and campaigning undertaken for so long by so many people.

As recently as last month, when I spoke to the annual conference of a very good park owners association—the British Holiday and Home Parks Association—in Edinburgh, I was told quite sincerely by a number of people that there really are no problems in park homes, and that any issues are stirred up by agitators and the permanently disgruntled.

At the conference, research was quoted—from about 1990—from the then Department of the Environment, stating that nine tenths of residents are happy with their lot. There are a great many knowledgeable, decent and honest park owners—I know that because I have met many of them—but, on that matter, they are absolutely wrong. I know that they are wrong because I have attended many public meetings, on many subjects—one man and his dog turn up at many of the meetings, although the dog usually goes away half way through them—and have come to realise that 70, 80 or 100 older people do not come along to such meetings if there is not a real problem.

I also know that those park owners are wrong because I have met Professor Philip Kenny, of the university of Northumbria, who has been a legal adviser on park homes for 15 years. He has called for radical reform of the Mobile Homes Act 1983, to align current law with housing legislation, and has commented that

"persons who are strangers to the world of mobile homes would be astounded by the absolute power of financial oppression that one person has over another."

I also know that they are wrong because I have listened to the experience of IPHA$'s advisers—people of courage and integrity—such as Joan Aylott, Alan Savory, Colin Packman and Bernard Johnson. It takes courage and integrity to do the work that they have done over so many years.

Courage and integrity are qualities possessed also by Roy Waite, who for many years has been a driving force in park home residents organisations. Roy is watching this debate and, after it, will probably tell me that I have it all wrong. However, if he were on the Floor of the House, he could tell hon. Members about local authorities that have completely failed to regulate and inspect parks; of councils whose own parks have been neglected; of the grotesque exploitation of vulnerable people, pressured to sell their homes way below market value; of residents harassed by park owners wanting to redevelop a site that the residents are entitled to occupy permanently; and of the outrageous, criminal treatment of the residents who came home to find their home towed off the site and dumped by the roadside.

I have seen some excellent examples of park home living. However, in a recent study of harassment, the centre for urban and rural studies, at the university of Birmingham, has shown that there is a general feeling that current arrangements are ineffective, and that the protection of residents' civil rights offered by the law, by industry self-regulation, by residents' associations and by other agencies is inadequate.

The loopholes afforded by legislation that was intended to apply to caravans, but that now applies to a very important part of the United Kingdom's housing resources, may create circumstances in which the vulnerable, poor and old—and those who are ignorant of their rights, or are without the self-confidence, knowledge or resources to enforce those rights—are exploited. It is an issue that cannot be ignored by any decent and responsible Government who are committed to meeting housing need, to ensuring supply of good-quality, affordable housing, and to fairness.

I believe in the truth of the words uttered by one of my constituents, at our very first meeting in Garstang, that, somewhere in the United Kingdom:

"Rachman is alive and well and running a residential park."

I believe that, among the great majority of perfectly decent people running residential parks, there are some rogues from whom people should be protected. I believe that we have a potentially very fine, very important industry that is being undermined. Its reputation is being damaged. It could do so much better, both in meeting housing need and in providing business opportunities, but only if we get the problems sorted out and if—this is probably an insult to cowboys—we kick out the cowboys.

It is a good industry. That is demonstrated by nothing so well as the monthly magazine, *Park Home and Holiday Caravan*, which is indefatigably edited by Anne Webb and reports not only the good but the bad sides of the industry. The magazine reports on comfortable, secure, often extremely attractive and well-run parks, and on the ever-developing design of park homes. In a recent edition, I read an inspirational piece about the way in which a park home had been creatively adapted to meet the needs of a disabled person. This month, we heard of a group of residents who, between them, have bought the park in which they were living and are now managing it co-operatively.

The British Home and Holiday Parks Association and the National Park Homes Council are responsible organisations of park owners, run by competent and reasonable people. We have seen the industry attempt its own quality assurance—from the park homes charter to the gold seal assurance for park homes; the National Park Homes Council's quality awards for parks, which are setting high standards—and whose residents are now able

[Mr. Dawson]

to access 25-year finance packages; and the forthcoming involvement of the independent housing ombudsman. Those are all worthy initiatives—let us make no mistake about it—but they are no substitute for fundamental reform of the law, and they should not be touted as such.

I was pleased to be part of an all-party delegation led by Lord Graham, in late 1997, to see the Minister for Local Government and Housing, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), and was absolutely delighted that she agreed to establish a review of legislation on park homes and to involve in that review representatives of the main industry groups, the three residents associations and the Local Government Association.

I have been to one meeting and received the minutes. The group appears to be working well. It is a focus of national interest from people living in park homes throughout the country. It has commissioned research, defined many areas for discussion and developed good working relationships between all parties. People of good will on all sides are making positive contributions. It is rightly tackling the complex issues on which we need reform in primary and secondary legislation.

We must have standard written agreements signed by both parties at the time of sale. It is nonsense that, under the Mobile Homes Act 1983, they can be delivered three months later. We must have an appropriate time limit, perhaps 28 days, from receipt of references for a park owner to decide whether to approve a private sale or to give clear reasons—there can be perfectly good reasons—why it cannot go ahead. It would be sensible if purchasing procedures were formalised to register the occupancy of the pitch and the sale of the home.

I am amazed by how trusting people are when they invest so much money and make a major life decision to take on park home living. That is a legacy of caravans. Some park homes cost more than £100,000. Many others cost much less, but may still require the investment of life savings. It is palpably not an undertaking to be entered into lightly, without proper searches and legal advice. The ability of a park owner to levy a commission of up to 10 per cent. of the value on the sale of a park home—it is often a 10 per cent. fee for doing nothing—is an incentive to the unscrupulous to persuade people to move on. I have no doubt about the anger felt by those who improve the value of their home and see the commission increase.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I do not disagree with what the hon. Gentleman has said, but does he find it curious that after its investigation Shelter did not recommend the abolition of the commission? Does he know why that view was taken?

Mr. Dawson: I am not advocating the abolition of the commission. I understand why Shelter took that view. Responsible park owners and organisations have told me that, together with new home sales, siting charges and pitch fees, the commission is a crucial way of financing new investment in parks. Without the 10 per cent. commission, pitch fees would have to rise accordingly, which could make park home living less accessible to people in housing need.

New investment in parks is vital. We must have improvement and modernisation. It is reasonable for those who work hard and invest their money to expect a fair return. The financing of home parks is the knottiest problem. We need more openness and clarity about it. Pitch fees should be negotiated properly between the park owner and the park resident. We need a neutral system of fair pitch fees and the equivalent of a rent officer to support it. If the commission is to be retained, it could be banded according to value. If we stick with 10 per cent., some estate agency services could be provided within that commission without an extra 2.5 per cent. being levied.

The role of local authorities is crucial. Councils should have a powerful duty to protect and enforce. As well as granting planning permission and licensing a park, councils should have a statutory duty to inspect that the crucial licensing issues of numbers, space, infrastructure, services and amenities are being maintained. Perhaps in partnership with a voluntary agency, they could provide accurate, disinterested housing advice to residents and owners and could take on a role as a prosecutor for harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. When the Government have dealt with all those issues, I look forward to the rebanding of park homes valued at less than £40,000 for council tax purposes. That is for another day and comes under different legislation, but it is still an important issue that is worth flagging up.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I hesitate to interrupt, but my hon. Friend has made a plea for someone to inspect and uphold conditions and possibly to prosecute. The Government are considering setting up a housing inspectorate, which would be independent of local authorities because they might be subject to inspection and prosecution. Bearing in mind what my hon. Friend has said about some local authorities being park owners, as in my constituency, might there be a case for asking the Minister whether the housing inspectorate could take on the role that my hon. Friend described?

Mr. Dawson: That is a thoroughly good idea and I look forward to the Minister's response.

I do not underestimate the size of the task facing the park homes working group, the industry or residents, but they are up to it. The group must set out the rights and responsibilities of residents and owners clearly in law; oversee fairness in pitch fee reviews; ensure that local authorities or an independent organisation play a powerful new role in setting and monitoring standards; and provide an accessible source of solid advice and information. All those interested in the industry should welcome that, as should anyone who understands that fairness, openness, good communication and decent relationships should be at the heart of a people-oriented business.

I am confident that the working party will come forward with some excellent recommendations. The task will not go away, because there is a problem at the heart of the industry. When the working party has fully got to grips with the problem and made its recommendations to Ministers, I trust that the Government will take action during this Parliament. Vulnerable residents have been patient, but they cannot wait for ever. The industry has a future in providing quality, safe and secure accommodation in lovely, mainly rural surroundings, principally for older people. We need the industry to pull its weight.

When the problems are resolved, the industry can provide housing and business opportunities for the living and working countryside that will emerge from the new rural White Paper. Even under a new system of regulation, park homes can be less intrusive than housing, providing sustainable, workable solutions to many of the issues of old age and affordable housing on an appropriate scale for those who have lived their lives in rural areas and for those who, having spent years earning a living in towns and cities, are fully entitled to want something different in their retirement.

I am not suggesting isolated enclaves of older people in the countryside. There are parish councillors and members of the local Age Concern group among the residents of Wyre Vale park. They provide services for their community. One of them, Mr. Dennis Hollowday, is the town cryer at Garstang. He does a fine job. A reformed park homes system can play a uniquely positive role in the new life of the countryside, as can older people. Reform has been needed for so long and the Government are to be praised to the skies for picking up the baton and running with it. Let us see them finish the race in style.

11.30 am

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) on securing today's Adjournment debate and dealing comprehensively with some of the problems faced by those who own and rent mobile homes.

Three statutes currently regulate mobile home occupation. The Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 requires site owners to obtain a site licence from the local authority before any land may be used as a caravan site. The Caravan Sites Act 1968 gave basic protection to all mobile home occupiers living on protected sites. It prevented site owners from evicting occupiers with residential contracts other than by obtaining a court order. The Mobile Home Act 1983 went further and gave security of tenure to those with mobile homes who own the home in which they live and rent the pitch from the site owner.

One of the main complaints about the 1983 Act is that it gave mobile home owners insufficient rights over increases in pitch fees demanded by site owners. Many site owners use a standard agreement drawn up by the National Federation of Site Operators. It contains a pitch fee review clause and takes into account such factors as the retail prices index and sums expended by the owner on the upkeep of the park.

Another factor that causes occupiers considerable concern involves the problems that they face when site owners try to block their right to sell to a third party. A survey by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions found that more than 25 per cent. of respondents anticipated some problem when they came to sell their homes and 51 per cent. anticipated problems because of the park owner. Site owners are entitled to claim commission of up to 10 per cent. of the sale price of mobile homes on their sites. The justification for that charge is that what is sold is an amalgam of the value of the mobile home and the value of the site on which it is placed.

Site residents have also complained of poor conditions on parks. A Shelter report noted that local authority practice in enforcing the site licence conditions under the 1960 Act was "variable". Other problems experienced by mobile home owners include illegal eviction, harassment by site owners who had obtained planning permission, and grey areas within the legislation that are open to exploitation by unscrupulous site owners. The high percentage of elderly people who live in mobile home parks also increases the potential for exploitation.

Council tax is another problem for those who live in mobile homes. Nearly all mobile homes are in band A, which covers properties valued up to £40,000. Many mobile homes are not worth anything near that sum and the council tax banding should be amended to reflect that.

The DETR established a park homes working group last year with a view to reviewing a number of issues related to mobile homes. I hope that the Minister will be able to let us know how its work is progressing.

Mobile homes make an important contribution to the availability of affordable housing in rural areas in the private and public sectors. Compared with urban areas, the rural housing market has a high proportion of owner-occupation at 73 per cent., a high proportion of private renting at 12 per cent., but a low proportion of social housing at just 15 per cent. Demand for housing is significant and includes that arising from more affluent local households, retirees, commuters, second home owners and in some areas summer holiday lets.

In December 1998, the Rural Development Commission said:

> "High demand from people wishing to move into the countryside or to have a holiday home, coupled with the constraints on the supply of housing, have forced up the price of housing so that it is not affordable to local people on low incomes. In 1991 it was estimated that in many rural areas 40 per cent. of new households would be unable to afford to enter the owner occupied housing market."

Recent research on rural housing found that the majority of new housing in rural areas was built by the private sector for the upper end of the market and that new social housing provided by local authorities or housing associations fell short of replacing that loss by the right-to-buy scheme. It is worth remembering that in the period 1981 to 1991 the stock of local authority dwellings fell by about a third.

As the stock of social housing has declined, so has the option to rent privately. Much of the private rented sector has been sold for owner occupation or converted into holiday accommodation. Those trends are likely to continue in social housing and the private rented sector, suggesting that rural housing needs are likely to increase.

Projected household growth, technological and economic trends and the fact that many people wish to live in the countryside mean that the demand for housing in rural areas will remain strong. Therefore, the price of housing in rural areas will continue to increase. It is important that any further decline in the private rented sector is halted and new opportunities are developed, particularly in rural areas.

Another problem is the under-representation of young adults in rural populations. A high proportion of young people in rural areas live in the parental home—82 per cent. of males and 67 per cent. of females compared with 67 per cent. and 51 per cent. respectively in urban areas.

The supply of housing in rural areas is currently inadequate to respond to the needs of young people. Housing information and advice need to be made more

[Mr. Adrian Sanders]

widely available across rural areas as few social housing resources are devoted to meeting the needs of young people. The private rented sector also has an important role to play in providing housing for young people.

The Rural Development Commission says:

"The provision of affordable housing is caught in a spiral . . . we believe that the time is right for a new rural housing initiative aimed at addressing the problems of housing and homelessness in rural areas in a comprehensive way, bringing together the Housing Corporation, local authorities, Registered Social Landlords, private lenders and the many public, private and voluntary organisations who have an important role to play."

My party has recognised that. We would give councils stronger powers to insist that developers included low-cost housing for local people in new developments. We would also seek to increase the availability of low-cost rural housing. We would allow councils to remove the 50 per cent. council tax rebate for second homes. Additionally, where ownership of second homes is squeezing out local home buyers, we would permit councils to introduce a variable premium of up to 100 per cent. on the council tax or a flat-rate tax to reduce purchases of second homes and/or to require change-of-use planning consent for the transfer of a full-time residence to use as a second home. All the revenue raised should be retained by the local authorities for specific community purposes with no reduction in Government grants.

In conclusion, while the rights of park home owners need to be enhanced, it must not be at the expense or discouragement of responsible site owners. Park homes have an important role to play in the provision of affordable homes in rural areas. A new A-minus council tax banding should be created to reflect the lower value of mobile homes. Second-home owners should not be rewarded as they are under the present system, but made to pay their fair share of local taxes. Councils should be allowed to spend their capital receipts, not simply given borrowing permissions against a proportion of their value and either alone, or in partnership with housing associations, they should be encouraged to build new homes where there is local need. Support for young people in rural areas should be improved to reduce the disadvantage that they face in the housing market.

Finally, given that the overall level of public spending on housing at the end of this Government's term of office will be lower than under the Conservatives, it is difficult to see how any of the problems that I have highlighted will be tackled adequately. However, I know that the Government are concerned about the issue, and I am hopeful that we will hear some good news from the Minister when he responds.

11.40 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) on securing this debate and giving us the opportunity to raise a crucial issue, particularly in rural areas.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) drew attention to the three critical pieces of legislation on the statute book: the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960, the Caravan Sites Act 1968—a landmark piece of legislation, which gave basic protection to all occupiers of mobile homes living on protected sites—and the Mobile Homes Act 1983.

As the hon. Member for Torbay pointed out, the 1983 Act went further than the 1968 Act, and gave security of tenure to residents of mobile home sites who owned the home in which they lived and rented the pitch from the site owner. As the hon. Gentleman said, as with the 1968 Act, the 1983 Act only covered owners and occupiers of protected sites. The central feature of the 1983 Act was the requirement on the site owner to serve a written statement on the occupier containing the express and implied terms of the agreement within three months of making it.

The implied terms that are incorporated by statute into agreements between site owners and owners of mobile homes cover such issues as the home owner's indefinite right to live in the home on the site unless the agreement is validly terminated by either party; the circumstances in which a valid termination of the agreement may take place; the occupier's right to sell or give the mobile home to a person approved by the site owner; and the rules regarding succession as they apply to owners and occupiers.

The House will be aware, from the reasoned and reasonable speech of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre, that the vast majority of site owners in this country are decent, honourable individuals who genuinely seek to ensure that the sites that they own provide facilities that enhance the quality of life for those living on the sites. Unfortunately, a small minority—as in many other walks of life—tarnish the good work and honourable behaviour of decent site owners by their unscrupulous, short-cut approach to the ownership of sites.

Regardless of that, three main problems have been alluded to in the debate. The first is the question of pitch fees. Many sources of argument about this matter between owners and residents are due to a lack of transparency. Reports and investigations carried out over the past 20 years have shown that a general complaint is that there has not been enough discussion and transparency in respect of increasing pitch fees. That has done a great deal to sour relations.

Secondly, there is the problem of selling the mobile home and the issue of the 10 per cent. commission fee, a matter with which the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre dealt comprehensively. He explained why Shelter did not recommend the abolition of the commission fee, and the reasons given were probably right. However, the fee is misunderstood by residents, and there should be more transparency and greater explanation of the reasons and purposes for the fee so that one can minimise the sense of grievance of some residents.

Thirdly, there is the issue of site conditions. As I said, the vast majority of site owners are honourable and decent people who seek to provide a high quality of life on their sites. However, there are too many complaints concerning the minority who do not live up to such reputable standards. The Shelter report showed that local authority practice in enforcing the licence conditions under the 1960 Act was variable, and that was reinforced by the then Department of the Environment in its 1992 survey.

Other problems are experienced by owners of mobile homes, including illegal eviction and harassment by site owners—a matter referred to by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre. More must be done to ensure that local authority practice in enforcing licences is carried out on a more uniform basis and to a higher standard

throughout the country to protect residents, and more pressure must be brought to bear on site owners who fail to provide decent standards.

It should never be forgotten that a number of those homes are valuable—and not only in commercial terms. In a way, that is irrelevant. More importantly, these are the homes of individuals and their families. They deserve as high a quality and standard as any of us participating in the debate would expect in our own homes. Because they have chosen—or, in some cases, have to live in—an alternative form of housing to the vast majority of housing in this country, there is no excuse and no reason whatever why those people should be expected or forced to accept lower standards than those that we would expect.

In conclusion, hon. Members have drawn attention to the Government's establishment of a working party to look into the matter. I welcome that. It will be interesting to see whether the Minister is in a position today to give the House any further information about the progress of that working party, although I fully understand that it may be premature to expect such an explanation. However, if he were able to give it, it would be beneficial.

All of us will look forward to the publication of the working party's report. Hopefully, it can identify areas where there is a need to move forward, and we will then be in a better position to evaluate what action needs to be taken, if any, to enhance and improve the quality of life for the owners of mobile homes.

11.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) on securing a debate on this important subject, and on the clear and comprehensive way in which he outlined the issues that we must consider.

I share the belief of my hon. Friend that park homes—sometimes referred to as mobile homes—can play a significant role in the wider housing market. Most park home sites are in rural or coastal areas, and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) rightly highlighted some of the difficulties faced by people in securing accommodation in rural areas. Park homes can extend the choice and opportunity for people living in such areas—particularly the elderly and couples without children—to live in decent, affordable homes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre made a particularly telling point when he described the way in which elderly people have benefited from good-quality, attractive accommodation in park homes where they can lead a pleasant and peaceful life and enjoy the amenities.

My hon. Friend referred to the issue of definitions, and mentioned that the definition of a park home is no different from that of a caravan.

The Government are in no doubt that park homes have well outgrown their origins as caravan dwellings. In the early days, caravans often catered for people who could not find anything better and lived in a caravan because it was the only option, even though it was not suitable as permanent accommodation. The situation today is very different. A modern, well laid out park home estate with new homes is worlds away from the old-style caravan site, and park homes—as all hon. Members who contributed to today's debate have stressed—can offer an attractive form of low-cost, permanent housing.

Park homes provide a unique form of tenure which brings its own benefits but can also bring its own unique problems. The resident owns his or her home but rents the pitch on which it stands. I recognise that park homes legislation has not been revised for some 16 years and so may not benefit from comparable advances in mainstream housing legislation. One might compare the protections afforded to private tenants against harassment and illegal eviction with those covering the park homes sector.

I also appreciate the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre that park home sites need efficient and effective controls over issues such as the layout of parks and the scope of park operators to change them, and the conditions in the park, which the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) rightly highlighted. All hon. Members will agree with him that people living in park homes should have the right to proper and decent conditions. However, before we delve too deeply into wholesale changes to planning legislation, we need to examine carefully the pivotal role that local authorities have to play in that area through the site licensing arrangements. We should examine ways to ensure that existing legislative controls are put to best use.

The unusual nature of the park homes form of tenure can sometimes create tensions between residents and park owners or operators. Finding a balance between the needs of both parties is not easy but the Government are committed to ensuring that both get a fair deal. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre will agree that for many people park home life is a pleasant and relatively trouble-free existence. He highlighted the high quality environment provided by a Mr. and Mrs. Ward in his constituency and his stories could be echoed by many other hon. Members who have park homes in their constituencies and observe well laid out and managed parks providing an excellent environment for people to live in.

Research for my Department in 1990 suggested that most residents were satisfied with park home life. More than 90 per cent. were very or fairly satisfied with their home and more than 80 per cent. were similarly satisfied with the park they lived on. Relations between park operators and residents on most parks were also good. More recent research revealed very similar levels of satisfaction and it is important that we bear that in mind. Problems exist, and I do not want to hide from that fact, but the large majority of park home residents have a pleasant life style in pleasant conditions and are happy with the arrangements.

The park homes industry has done much to raise standards in the sector. The two main trade associations—the British Holiday and Home Parks Association and the National Park Homes Council—have developed and refined a park homes charter for their members. It offers residents and prospective residents guidance on their rights and responsibilities and sets out the minimum level of service they can expect to receive from their park operator.

However, as I am all too aware from my postbag and from what has been said in this debate, not all park home residents receive the quality of service that they are entitled to expect. It is clear that a minority—it is only a

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

minority—of park operators make their residents' lives a misery, either through neglect or, in some cases, deliberate mismanagement. Some may be genuinely ignorant or unclear about their legal responsibilities. Others may cut corners to keep costs down, but a few deliberately and openly break the law. Only a small number of rogue operators may fit into that category but that is no comfort to the residents on the receiving end of their actions. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre graphically described the failings and problems brought to his attention. His image of the idyllic summer evening meeting in Garstang, which subsequently turned out to be a recital of the serious problems affecting many elderly people, was something that the House will have listened to with concern.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre is an active member of the all-party group for the welfare of mobile home owners. The group plays a crucial role in focusing attention on the issues that are of concern to park home residents, including security of tenure, the written agreement between resident and park owner, pitch fee reviews and issues relating to home sale, including the sales commission payable when a home is sold.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre referred to the important role that local authorities play in the park homes sector and he highlighted the good work of Wyre council in his area. Local authorities have powers to control health and safety conditions through the site licensing system and to tackle any problems of harassment and illegal eviction faced by residents. However, it is clear that local authorities' performance in these areas varies widely. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford highlighted the Shelter report, which found a wide variation in local authority performance.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I have listened with fascination to the debate because, like most rural areas, Stroud contains several park homes, which are very well run. One of the problems of the relationship with local authorities is the grey area of who actually provides the service. I hope that the working party will be able to clarify that issue, because at the moment it is too easy for the local authority to pass the buck to the site owner and vice versa. That seems to be where some of the difficulties occur.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a fair point about the importance of clarity in responsibilities and the avoidance of buck passing. I assure him that the debate this morning will be considered carefully by the working party, as part of its general work, and I can confirm that the need to establish a clear framework to provide greater clarity and understanding of obligations—and, therefore, greater certainty that good practice will prevail—will be part of our objective. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford stressed the importance of transparency in the arrangements so that it is clear who owes what duty to whom, and everyone understands the arrangements for prices. I expect the working party to consider that carefully.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) raised the question of a housing inspectorate taking over the role from local authorities of examining conditions on sites. I do not believe that would be an appropriate role for the inspectorate, and it would lead to a confusion of roles between local authorities which have existing public health and other planning responsibilities for parks. If those were cut across by another body, it might be a recipe for confusion and a lack of clarity. That is not the way forward, because we want to see arrangements that ensure that proper standards are maintained and appropriate action is taken when sites fail to meet those standards.

Following discussions between members of the all-party group—including my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre and Lord Graham, to whom my hon. Friend paid a well deserved tribute for his long-standing interest in the subject and the hard work that he has done to pursue the interests of park home residents—and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing, my Department agreed to establish the park homes working party to examine the problems in more detail.

The working party was established last year and comprises representatives from the two main trade associations representing park operators, three national residents' groups, the Local Government Association, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Welsh Office and officials from my Department. It is making good progress. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre knows, it has kept the all-party group closely informed of its deliberations and he has had the opportunity to observe one of its meetings at close hand. I am grateful for the tribute paid by my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Housing for setting up the working party, and for his kind words about the working party's approach to its task.

The working party is taking a very comprehensive look at the statutory framework of park homes legislation in order to identify best current practice in the application and enforcement of controls by local authorities. It will explore whether significant gaps or weaknesses exist in the legislation that might be remedied. The working party will consider the question, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre, of how park homes should be defined.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) was present earlier in the debate and raised the matter of holiday homes. The legislation covering holiday homes is different from that applying to mobile homes and park homes. The Office of Fair Trading has responsibility for holiday home standards and is working closely with the industry to raise those standards.

Initially, the working party's work has concentrated on the role of local authorities. Its primary aim is to develop best practice guidance on how to make the most effective use of existing legislative powers.

Research commissioned by my Department is informing the working party's consideration of the problem of harassment and illegal eviction in the park homes sector. We had hoped that the Local Government Association would be able to take forward work on site licensing controls through a survey of its members. However, the response was disappointing and few authorities focused on issues of best practice. My Department has therefore decided to deal with this element of the working party's remit by means of a further research project and is in the process of inviting tenders for that research.

The working party is also now starting to consider the perceived gaps and weaknesses in park homes legislation. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre will agree that it is leaving no stone unturned in its close scrutiny of the issues. It will consider all the main matters raised today, including those highlighted by my hon. Friend and by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford described three key problems: pitch fees, sale and commission arrangements, and site conditions. He rightly stressed the importance of clarity and transparency in arrangements, and I have already said that I agree. He also emphasised the importance of ensuring that all park home residents should be able to enjoy decent conditions, and I entirely concur with that.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford asked about the working party's progress. I hope that what I have said has demonstrated the working party's approach to the task. Quite a lot of work remains to be done, so it will be some time before the report is complete. The hon. Gentleman, and the House, will appreciate that it would be premature of me to make any commitments before the working party has completed the review.

Because of the delays with its study into best practice, the working party is having to review its work timetable. It had originally hoped to produce recommendations to Ministers by autumn last year on making effective use of existing legislation, and by spring this year on the need, if any, to amend legislation. However, it now aims to produce recommendations on the former later this year. I know that many people would like quick results, but I am convinced that a careful and thorough approach to such important issues will pay dividends in the long run.

We have to try and take as many people as possible with us. There is a large measure of agreement between all parties in the industry and among residents, and the aim is to secure the best for all concerned. It is important to build on the large amount of goodwill that exists. We must not allow divisions over relatively minor matters to breach the consensus that will be helpful for the future of the industry and which will benefit the conditions on park home sites.

Until the working party has completed its task, I am not ruling anything in or out. It would be wrong to pre-empt its conclusions, as I have said. However, it is only fair that I make it clear to the House that, given the pressure on the parliamentary timetable, it is very unlikely that any changes could be made to primary legislation in the short term. We would also need to consider any forthcoming recommendations for significant change against the background of the Government's commitment to better regulation. We would need to examine carefully the costs and benefits of any change and the impact it might have on the park homes industry and others.

Mr. Dawson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and appreciate what he has said about the need for thoroughness to ensure that all relevant issues are properly reviewed and resolved. However, does my hon. Friend accept that many thousands of people all over the country will greet with considerable dismay his statement that legislation is unlikely in the short term? They know that these serious matters have to be resolved in a thorough manner, but they need them to be resolved within a reasonable time.

Mr. Raynsford: I hear what my hon. Friend says, and I too want action to be taken as quickly as possible. However, my hon. Friend must recognise that there is undoubtedly scope for making progress through best practice. We must explore that option to ensure that existing arrangements are made to work better. Also, it is only fair to be honest about the legislative position. The problem does not arise only in connection with park homes: the Government—and many hon. Members—are keen to promote other very important legislation but, although there will be time in due course, legislation cannot be introduced quickly because of the requirement for all legislation to be properly scrutinised. That takes time, and the pressures on the parliamentary timetable inhibit the volume of legislation that can be introduced in any one year.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) raised three matters, two of which were touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre—council tax band A, and housing needs in rural areas. The hon. Gentleman also referred to overall levels of spending on housing investment.

I appreciate that many park homes fall into the lower end of band A, and that residents may feel aggrieved at the banding arrangements. However, in any system that uses valuation bands rather than actual valuations, it is inevitable that properties of slightly different size, character and value will pay the same council tax. That is implicit in any banding system.

Last year, we carried out a thorough review of the system of local government finance, including the council tax. The large consensus was that the existing arrangements were working reasonably well, and that it would be premature to make any dramatic changes. Revaluation is a very expensive operation that cannot be done quickly, as any revaluation has knock-on consequences. We are keeping the council tax under review, and will reconsider the case for improvements to the system if we carry out a revaluation during the next Parliament, but I do not believe that such a revaluation is a high priority requiring urgent action.

I can tell the hon. Member for Torbay that, since 1989, the Housing Corporation has directed funding from its approved development programme to a special rural housing programme, targeted at villages with populations of fewer than 3,000 people. In the 10 years to 1999, the programme provided some 16,000 new rural homes. For the current 1999-2000 financial year, we have asked the Housing Corporation to aim for around 3.4 per cent. of new social letting under the programme to be in villages inhabited by fewer than 3,000 people.

We have also increased substantially the overall level of housing resources available to local authorities. In 1997-98 and 1998-99, the capital receipts initiative has made nearly £800 million available to local authorities in England. That is to be followed by the extra £3.6 billion for local authority housing investment over the three years 1999-2000 to 2001-2002 announced in the comprehensive spending review.

Our guidance to local authorities on the development of their housing strategies makes it clear that they should consider carefully the needs of all groups, including rural

[Mr. Raynsford]

communities, and plan accordingly. We expect local authorities to make their contribution to meeting rural housing needs in areas where it is a local priority. It is not true that, at the end of this Parliament, the level of housing investment under the Labour Government will be lower than it was at the end of the previous Parliament. By the end of this Parliament, the level of capital investment will be double that which we inherited. It does no service to the House or to housing to pretend otherwise.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising this very important issue today. Park home life plays an important role in today's housing market. For most residents, it offers good-quality accommodation on well-run sites. As we know, for others, the picture is less rosy. It is in everyone's interests that we address the problems that blight a minority of parks. I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government are determined to do so and are anxious that progress will continue, through the park homes working party, to ensure that the legislation works effectively for park operators and residents and, where it is found wanting, we shall look carefully at the case for change.

Education Funding (Cornwall)

12.11 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I appreciate the opportunity to initiate a debate on this important issue. I appreciate even more the fact that we now have a little more time for the debate, although I hope that the Minister has not been too much inconvenienced. Some of my colleagues on both sides of the House with Cornish constituencies may want to take advantage of some of that extra time. As my speech was rather tightly timed, I may relax slightly. Although there might be some slight variations of view—there are certainly variations in the interpretation of what has been happening recently—all Members with Cornish constituencies are united across the political divide as to the case for a fair deal for children in Cornish schools. We share concern about the difficulties experienced by schools in matching funding with the important principle of ensuring that our children receive the best possible education.

The background to that concern is the Conservative education legacy that left schools in crisis, nowhere more so than in Cornwall. Perhaps it is no surprise that not one Conservative Member is in the Chamber at present; it would be extremely difficult for them to defend that position. There were cuts in local council funding and an endless revolution in education policy, as successive Secretaries of State felt the need to make their mark. As they could not offer the funding that was actually needed, they offered change. That was change that teachers could have done without, because they had a job to get on with—delivering quality education. Schools were left underfunded and teachers were left demoralised.

The election of the new Labour Government, pledging to make education a No. 1 priority, was, therefore, a cause for real optimism among teachers and parents alike. However, during the past year, desperate letters from demoralised teachers and school governors have reappeared in my postbag—they were not there for a while after the general election—and the reasons are not hard to find. The financial position is especially acute in Cornwall, because the Conservatives took the view that Cornish children needed less funding for their education than children in other parts of the country. Almost £10,000 less was received for a primary school with 100 pupils, and that was £10,000 less every year. A small secondary school with 500 pupils received £50,000 less each year. Throughout the county, that was a great many books, computers, teachers and classroom assistants.

I have never accepted the way in which Government standard spending assessments are calculated for rural areas, such as my own. Although I shall be critical about the lack of change, I hope that the Minister for School Standards will accept that I understand that is a legacy from the previous Government and that it is not easy to change. She might be aware that I raised that matter in debate several years ago under the previous Government, and that I received precious little response.

However, even with our funding shortfall, Cornish schools have always produced outstanding results. In a recent survey, more Cornish schools were picked out for praise than in any other education authority in the south-west. That is due to the dedication of staff and the extremely supportive, although financially poor,

local communities. Parents of children at schools raise funds, but, equally, they provide children with a supportive environment at home; elsewhere in the country, that may not happen as much as it should.

Yet why should our schools receive less funding than other areas, even if they achieve good results with the funds available? I hope that the Minister will agree that Cornish children need the same help as those in any other area. We do not expect special treatment, and we understand that some children, in some places, need special help—for example, with languages—that does not normally apply in Cornish schools. However, the issue is broader than that; it goes beyond the few local authorities that have those special needs. We want a fair deal for our children and we believe that we deserve it.

At the turn of the year, I obtained some figures in response to a question from the Library. The answer was the last thing that I expected—it was certainly not the reason that I asked the question. The sad and surprising fact was that unfair allocation of funds—the differential between the national average and what we receive in Cornwall under the SSA—has become worse, not better, under the Labour Government. Our children now receive even less per head compared with the national average than under the Conservative Government. Every year, the cumulative effect of more than 10 years of decay and delay already does its worst to our children's education system. Labour have failed to take the action necessary to put that right. The debate offers me an opportunity to draw that to the Minister's attention, and hopefully, the matter can be reconsidered.

In part, it is a national issue and not merely a Cornish one. At the turn of the year, the latest national figures from the Audit Commission showed that, throughout the country, expenditure per pupil continues to fall in real terms by £53 per pupil in primary schools and by £90 per pupil in secondary schools. As I have explained, Cornwall's allocations are lower than that national average and are worsening by comparison.

Labour promised "Education, education, education", but since taking office, they have spent two years tied broadly to Tory education spending plans. Of course, it was a manifesto commitment to stick with those budget plans—one that Liberal Democrats criticised. We are seeing the results of that decision. At the general election, people voted to kick out those cuts in education, but so far it is precisely those cuts that the Labour Government have delivered.

However, there is not a shortage of funds. Gordon Brown has raised taxes overall; he has not cut them. According to a recent written answer, the Department for Education and Employment carried forward £121.7 million in unspent funds from 1997–98 to 1998–99, while schools throughout Great Britain continue to struggle for funding. I am sure that the Minister will point out that spending will rise during the years running up to the next general election and beyond, but during the whole Parliament, education expenditure in real terms is set to rise by only £3 billion above Conservative trends. I must compare that sum with the amount of more than £10 billion that would have been added for education, over the course of a Parliament, by the Liberal Democrat proposal for a penny on income tax.

The debate is about Cornwall in particular and, although I do not expect that the Minister will agree with me about the overall national figures, I want her to address the point that Cornish children are underfunded even in relation to those national problems. In 1996–97, the last year of the previous Conservative Government, under the SSA, children in Cornish primary schools were allowed £69 less each than the average for children in the rest of the country. Under the Labour Government, that figure has now risen to £89 less for each Cornish child. In 1996–97, each secondary school pupil received £84 less than the average for the rest of the country; under Labour, the amount is now £97 less per child.

The differential is significant. In a secondary school of 1,000 pupils, £97,000 every year is more than enough for the books, equipment and repairs that are needed. The Government's funding formula, calculated on pupil numbers, continues to discriminate against rural areas, where there are inevitably higher costs—especially for transport—because of their geography. This year, for example, Cornwall county council had allocated a large amount to school transport, but then found that it had an overrun of £1.2 million. There are also higher costs in maintaining relatively small schools in village communities. I believe that is entirely right, because such schools are vital to the infrastructure of those communities and provide a local education for children who might otherwise have to travel many miles. However, those schools are relatively expensive to support; they create difficulties over class sizes and require extra staff and administration that would not be necessary if there were a small number of much larger schools—as would be typical of urban areas.

Small village schools also suffer from erratic shifts in the school-age population, and the county council has to do its best to overcome that problem by ensuring that the loss of one or two pupils does not automatically result in the loss of a teacher. However, there comes a point where the funding allocation must result in the loss of a teacher, which is a catastrophe to a school that has only three or four teachers. A well-managed school with relatively reasonable class sizes can suddenly find itself a teacher short, with the head teacher having to do more classroom work and class sizes that have suddenly massively increased. Such changes cause devastating problems to local schools. Last year, I visited Tregony school, which lost a member of staff because local parents had literally produced one or two too few children. That loss led to bigger classes, mixed age groups and stressed teachers. If the Government allowed Cornwall the average national funding per pupil, that teacher need not have been lost from that school.

A wider issue is at stake: instead of the "bums on seats" funding mechanism, schools should receive needs-based financial support, so that all schools receive the amount they need to survive on a reasonable basis. Such a formula would allow for individuality of resources, pupil numbers and location and be far fairer to rural areas by leaving the decision making on funding to local education authorities, which are more likely to know the needs of the local area than Mr. Blunkett is. That is not a plea for far more reserved funding to the county—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Twice during his speech, the hon. Gentleman has referred

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

to right hon. Members by their surname. He should know by now that he should refer to them either by the name of their constituency, or by the office they hold.

Mr. Taylor: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not aware that I was doing that, but I shall try to ensure that I get it right from now on.

The process of increasing flexibility is not one whereby Cornwall county council tries to reserve more funds centrally—in fact, the county council has a record of going beyond Government requirements in allocating funds directly to schools. However, greater flexibility is required.

Over the past two years, a group of Cornwall county council officers, school governors and secondary heads have conducted a needs analysis to determine what funds local schools needed to meet national curriculum requirements and the basic standards mentioned in documents published by both the previous Government and the current Government. "Costing Cornwall's Schools" revealed that a sensible calculation of the minimum amount Cornish schools need to provide a decent standard of education and an acceptable environment results in a £37 million shortfall under current funding formulas. That is a Conservative legacy and we do not expect the shortfall to be made up in one euphoric moment by the current Government realising that a mistake has been made and handing over the funds. However, as long as the problem is not addressed and moves in the right direction are not made, the cries of pain from Cornish schools will increase, especially from primary schools.

Largely as a consequence of underfunding, large numbers of Cornish children find themselves in classes of 31 or more. Large class sizes were the subject of specific and repeated criticism by Labour in opposition, but the startling and unexpected truth is that the problem in my county has worsened since Labour came to power. Nearly half of our primary school pupils are now in classes of 31 or more, and that proportion is rising steadily, despite the commitment in Labour's general election manifesto "Britain Deserves Better" to reduce class sizes to less than 30 in key stage 1.

Although, since Labour took office, the average proportion of pupils in classes of more than 30 has slightly decreased in England, the problem has become worse in Cornwall, with 300 more pupils than last year in classes of more than 30. Cornwall deserves better, and Labour promised better, so when are the Government going to do better? In March 1999, the Audit Commission reported on the issue, saying:

"There is a strong relationship between the percentage of larger classes and spending per pupil."

That relates precisely to the problems I have been describing. I might add that a teacher pointed out that bringing four-year-olds into schools as part of the process of giving more four-year-olds the opportunity to start in a school environment results in difficulty in achieving the class sizes targets in both key stage 2 and the classes that accept the four-year-olds.

Labour promised pre-school education for all four-year-olds, but that has had to be done on the cheap, because the Government tied themselves to Conservative spending plans. To get funds, schools have offered places to all four-year-olds, but it is rare that a proper nursery class can be afforded. That is not good for younger four-year-olds or their classmates in the often overcrowded classes that have resulted. Meanwhile, pre-school playgroups have been devastated by the loss of four-year-olds and the funds that they attracted, and that loss will not be made up by the inadequate Government support that has been offered. Nevertheless, I welcomed the recent announcement of extra support and told the pre-school playgroups that have been in touch with me that some money was coming.

In rural villages, such pre-school groups are often the only form of child care available, but group after group is folding. Prior to 1992, I was the Liberal Democrat education spokesman and I developed our policy in that area. Because we had the luxury of having promised to raise funds through an extra penny on income tax, we could promise parents pre-school education for all three and four-year-olds either in nursery classes, or in pre-school playgroups, according to parental choice. We would have funded premises hire, equipment, training and salaries for pre-school playgroups, so they would not have faced the problems that the current system has engendered, even though there would have been a trend of children moving into more formal nursery classes.

However, the Labour Government have not done that, with the result that, according to the Pre-School Learning Alliance, there have been 20 closures of pre-school groups in Cornwall alone since the end of 1996. Add to that the 28 pre-school groups that have told the alliance that they are worried about imminent closure and the result is that, since Labour's election, we shall have lost almost one in five of all the pre-school playgroups in the county.

Some of those groups are long-established, such as the one I visited recently in St. Austell, where the problems were causing real emotional distress. Although there are local people who want to use the playgroup, it has lost the core number it needs to make up the finances and so enable it to keep going at current staffing levels.

The national minimum wage, although welcome in many respects, is adding to that financial difficulty. I now receive a stream of letters from pre-school playgroups expressing similar concerns and asking me to visit. The closures are a real problem and the money that has been made available is not equal to the scale of the problem. That issue especially affects rural areas such as Cornwall that contain smaller communities, in which alternative support mechanisms for mothers are few and far between.

I receive many letters from Cornish school head teachers and governors who are struggling to cope. Only the other day, I received a letter from one head teacher who described how he was trying to cope with a deficit of thousands of pounds and, at the same time, honour the Government's commitment to lowering class sizes in key stage 1. He writes:

"In order to meet this shortfall I have prepared a budget which sought to retain our present organisation. Even this could not be achieved without cutting some teaching time, placing a 50 per cent. class based commitment upon myself, as well as cutting classroom support staff.

The final item is particularly painful in a school where 33.6 per cent. of pupils are on the Special Needs Register. If we are to keep our obligation to keep infant class sizes below 30, we shall be obliged to have large mixed age classes in key stage 2 with significantly less support for children in difficulty".

That letter illustrates the problems facing rural schools. Another local head teacher tells a similar story, saying:

"The original building is Victorian . . . the existing windows do not all even close properly . . . Although we have 22 per cent. of pupils on the special needs register, we cannot afford any additional teaching time for these pupils, therefore placing additional pressure on teachers to reach targets.

After the introduction of nursery vouchers, the school has accepted four year olds every term. Consequently, the reception class is always over 30 every Summer Term. In fact, the class size has been 38 twice in the last two years. As a class based headteacher, I spend 0.4 sessions in the office. This allocation has not been changed for more than five years, due to lack of funds, yet the amount of administration has significantly increased."

What am I looking for? Above all, I seek a sympathetic hearing from Ministers for the case that the Government's formula for allocating school funds nationally through SSAs desperately needs to be changed. Per pupil funding for Cornish schools needs to be far closer to the national average. The area cost adjustment means that funding is based on local wage levels, which greatly helps the south-east; yet teachers are paid on nationally set scales. We had hoped that the review of that process would significantly alter the distribution. We understand that progress is likely to be slow as there are losers as well as winners. Nevertheless, the movement so far has been in the opposite direction: we have fallen back relative to the national average.

Schools are funded according to average teacher salaries, yet many Cornish schools retain dedicated and experienced staff whose salaries are higher than the national pay scales as a result. I am not talking about a school's local flexibility, which I accept cannot be funded. Dedicated and experienced staff help to achieve results but hurt school finances. In some cases, teachers have lost their jobs because their salaries were too expensive. Allowance must be made for actual school salary costs.

Cornwall has many relatively costly small village schools, but Government funding largely ignores the extra costs—particularly school transport costs—generated by the county's geography. That matter needs urgent review. It is especially difficult to cut class sizes in small rural schools, particularly when the Government stick to funding formulae that are based overwhelmingly on pupil numbers, not real costs. In opposition, Labour calculated the cost of cutting class sizes to be around £68 million, but that figure has since increased 10-fold. I understand that the Government are struggling with real financial problems, but I am not yet convinced that they are aware of the particular problems facing smaller rural schools such as those in Cornwall. The real costs of maintaining pre-school education, including play groups, must be recognised better.

I have not yet mentioned an issue that I always broached with Conservative Ministers, who had a truly abysmal record in that area. I refer to investment in school buildings and infrastructure. I offer the Government a bouquet because those allocations have been much better. Cornwall's allocation this year is probably more than the county expected to receive—and is almost more than it can manage to spend. *[Interruption.]* But not quite. That is very good news. It will be a long time before the backlog of school dilapidation work, estimated at more than £100 million, is dealt with, but I am not critical of the Government in that regard. Most of the problems are a Conservative legacy, and I believe that Ministers are genuinely seeking to overcome them.

In contrast, I doubt that the Minister was aware that the spending per pupil figures for Cornwall were so poor. I was surprised by them when I requested the figures from the Library in January. At that time, I had no idea what the figures would show or that I would initiate an Adjournment debate on this subject. Having become aware of the situation, I sought to alert the Minister. Although we may differ about the Government's immediate record, we share a general, basic concern about the plight of Cornish schools and the way in which national formulae and systems operate.

12.33 pm

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I am grateful that we have extra time to discuss this subject, which is extremely important for the people—and particularly the children—of Cornwall. I congratulate the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on securing this Adjournment debate and enabling us to discuss the issue. However, that is where I part company with the hon. Gentleman and his views about education funding in Cornwall.

The hon. Gentleman said correctly that Labour inherited an appalling legacy from the previous Government, and he touched briefly on the good news that Cornwall has received regarding funding for capital programmes in the county. However, I do not think the hon. Gentleman painted the full picture.

There is a question regarding funding for secondary and junior schools within Cornwall. The county council has decided to give proportionately far more funding to secondary schools instead of junior and primary schools. Head teachers have formed a conference and have argued strongly that the county council—which, although not controlled by a single party, has a preponderance of Liberal Democrat councillors—must address that issue. I urge the hon. Gentleman to raise the matter with his county council colleagues because it is not fair that rural primary schools—many of which he referred to—should suffer a lack of funding as a result of decisions taken not by this Government but within the county.

The hon. Gentleman also neglected to mention the removal of outside toilets in Cornwall. For how many years did Liberal Democrat Members complain about the state of toilets in Cornish schools? Cornwall had the worst record in the country in that regard.

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris): New Labour, new toilets.

Ms Atherton: I agree with my hon. Friend. That move is tremendously welcome. I spoke yesterday to educationists who emphasised that outside toilets are a health issue. Children often refuse to go out in the rain to use outside toilets, which leads to long-term health problems. I congratulate the Government on providing the money and signalling the end of outside toilets in Cornish schools.

The Government have made an even bigger gift to Cornish schools in the form of the £50 million that will be allocated through a private finance initiative arrangement to revolutionise the school buildings in which Cornish children study. Three secondary schools in my constituency will be located on the same site, and one of them, Pool, is a designated school for children

[Ms Atherton]

with disabilities. The child of one of my constituents is a wheelchair user and Pool school has a bridge over which pupils must cross that is some 30 feet to 40 feet above the road. It is lunacy that that school should be designated for children with disabilities. My constituent's son cannot attend the school and my constituent must travel 30 miles every morning and evening with his son to a different school. Thanks to the Government, my constituents' children who are wheelchair users can look forward in the future to attending local schools with their friends. I welcome that advance.

I am sure that Opposition Members have visited Stithians school. Before elections, Conservative and Liberal Democrat candidates troop through that school in droves, never to be seen again. A week after the general election, the children of Stithians school e-mailed me to say, "Politicians from all parties come and visit our school, but we never see them after the election. Will you be different?" I visited that school and lodged a plea with education Ministers on its behalf. I am absolutely delighted, as are all at Stithians, that it is a priority school within the PFI arrangement.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: If the hon. Lady would like me to visit schools in her constituency, I should be delighted to do so.

Ms Atherton: The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has been a frequent visitor to Stithians, as have other senior politicians. I am telling the truth.

That arrangement will provide a boost to the entire village, of which Stithians school is the heart. More than 30 primary and junior schools will also benefit from the package.

I must take this opportunity to refer to the Redruth, Pool and Camborne education action zone—the documents and preparations for which are now complete—which concentrates on early years education. I have tremendous pleasure in announcing that those documents were printed this week and offer real opportunities to the schools, governors, pupils, parents and the communities of north Cornwall. It is a tremendous bid involving the business community and all the schools, and I hope that the Minister will look upon it with grace and favour when it comes before her.

I could not disagree more with the hon. Gentleman's analysis of education funding in Cornwall. I was recently in a car park when an aggressive-looking lady came and banged on the bonnet of my car, demanding that I wind down my window. I did so, thinking that I would not be happy to hear what she had to say. However, she said, "I had to stop you to tell you how pleased I am with what your Government are doing by putting money into Cornish schools." I rest my case.

12.40 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am grateful to the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) for giving me the opportunity to contribute briefly to the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend not only on securing the debate but on securing an unusual length for it—he has a happy knack of doing so.

I shall concentrate on points of agreement across the Floor, and I should point out that it was unfair of my colleagues to draw attention to the complete absence from the debate earlier of Conservative Members. This debate is about Cornish education and there are no Conservative Cornish MPs—Cornwall is a Tory-free zone—and it is only reasonable that Conservative Members should be absent from this debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not refer to the absence or otherwise of hon. Members. The purpose of an Adjournment debate is to allow an hon. Member to put a case to a Minister, so only the initiator of the debate, the Minister and, of course, Madam Speaker or a Deputy Speaker are required to be present.

Mr. Tyler: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is precisely the point that I was about to make—I thought that it would be unfair to concentrate on that issue.

There is agreement, first and foremost, that the situation that the Government faced in May 1997, in Cornwall as in other areas, was dire. The county's education system was suffering not only from the discrepancies to which my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell has already referred—I shall turn to those in a moment—but from a heavy backlog of lack of capital investment in its schools.

Secondly, it is common ground that despite that shortfall, the efforts of Cornwall's teachers, governors, parents and the community at large have produced remarkably good results. Nobody would dissent from that. Thirdly, there is agreement that over a long period—this did not suddenly happen—Cornish children in secondary and primary schools have suffered from a discrepancy.

Since May 1997, the local education authority—Cornwall county council—has not been controlled by a Liberal Democrat majority, but has been under no overall control. During that period, Labour councillors have been happy to support independent and Conservative councillors and appoint them to the chairs and vice-chairs of committees. The chair of the education committee is occupied not by a Liberal Democrat but by an independent councillor. There is a perception—I cannot say whether it is an entirely accurate one—that when the council has been under no overall control, the officers have taken a much bigger role in setting the council's priorities and policies, particularly on expenditure.

The previous Liberal Democrat chair of education and her committee were seeking to narrow the gap between the amount that was being devoted to front-line education resources—the schools themselves and other education services—and the amount retained at county hall. That situation has deteriorated, and the perception of the Cornish Association of Secondary Heads and the Cornish Association of Primary Heads is that county hall now retains a greater proportion of the resources made available to the county. That fulfils no national governmental pledge, let alone the wishes of the people of Cornwall. I hope that the county's officers will be prepared to reconsider that deteriorating situation, which was improving when the Liberal Democrats were in control of education.

I want to underline a couple of points that my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell has already made. He will recall visiting with me a small village

school in my constituency and being greeted on the doorstep by the head teacher with the words, "I am delighted to see you, but if you've come with more bright ideas from Government, thank you and goodbye." One of the previous Government's failures was to misunderstand the priority needs in many of our schools, which were for more investment rather than more instruction, and for more resources and fewer requirements about the national curriculum and other national policies.

A period of steady growth and improved investment, unaccompanied by the dramatic twists and turns of national policy, would also be extremely welcome in our schools. I suspect that in every classroom there must be a teacher who is wondering whether that process of incessant change will ever stop. The Government are, of course, taking measures that are good for schools. I hope that they will give teachers confidence that there will be steady progress rather than sharp twists and turns in national policy.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell has said, in the past few years, the discrepancy between the national average standard spending assessment per pupil and the SSA available in Cornwall has increased, and there is no immediate sign that it will not continue to do so. He quoted figures for the financial year 1996-97, in which Cornwall's primary schools received £69 per pupil less than the national average. In only three years, that figure has increased to £89. Similarly, the gap between the national average funding for secondary schools and the funding for Cornwall has increased from £84 per pupil to £97.

Those discrepancies are serious and must be urgently addressed; otherwise we shall be unable to deliver to the pupils, parents and community of Cornwall the education that they deserve. I believe, as I am sure other hon. Members do, in trying to give credit where credit is due. I believe in the Government's good intentions, and especially those of the team at the Department for Education and Employment, but we will be unable to deliver what our constituents desire unless there is a change.

I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell said about the capital programme. It is a great relief to be moving towards redressing the backlog of so many years. At the beginning of March, I celebrated the 25th anniversary of my original election to the House. During that period, it has been a constant sore that Cornwall has been left behind in the provision of modern facilities. However, modern facilities are not the whole answer, and there must be an lessening of the discrepancy between the running costs of our schools—particularly relating to the problem of teacher:pupil ratios—and the funding that they receive.

We hope that in the last two or three years of this Parliament the Government will break out of the self-imposed straitjacket of their predecessors' financial restrictions. I hope that when they do so, they will be prepared to attend to the major discrepancy from which we in Cornwall have suffered.

12.48 pm

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on securing the debate, to which I intend to make a brief contribution.

I should first point out that schools in my constituency are the responsibility of two local education authorities—Cornwall's and the Isles of Scilly's. People on the islands appreciate that the Government have recognised and responded to their special needs and concerns, particularly the problems faced by post-16-year-olds going on to further education.

I want to make three points about the debate on the financial settlement, a subject which has been well aired today. First, schools in my constituency continually complain about the lack of opportunity for long-term planning because of the late settlement of the budget each year. Every year, they are unable to plan for future years because they are given only a few weeks in which to undertake that essential planning.

Secondly, irrespective of the political debate, schools are concerned about the reduction in resources. In the past 10 years, St. Ives junior school in my constituency has experienced a 20 per cent. increase in pupil numbers but a 20 per cent. decrease in staff resources. Admittedly, the Government have been in power for only a small part of that time. Schools have many initiatives thrown at them and are given little time for thinking and planning to implement them. The Government ought perhaps to take on board the concerns that teachers, not just in my constituency but throughout Cornwall and, I suspect, the rest of the country, have expressed about that.

Thirdly, I seek reassurance from the Minister on behalf of schools in Cornwall that in future funding packages the Government will take into account Cornwall's geography and the fact that we necessarily have many small schools. Parents do not campaign to ensure that their children get a poor education, but they often campaign hard to keep small, local schools which provide high-quality education. That needs to be taken into account in future funding packages for LEAs like Cornwall's.

12.50 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris): I congratulate the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on securing this Adjournment debate. It is amazing that whenever hon. Members are fortunate enough to gain extra time for such debates, which is usually an accident, they have no difficulty at all, if the debates are about education, in getting colleagues from their area to join in.

I doubt that there is one hon. Member who does not spend much of his or her constituency time visiting schools and talking to parents about such an incredibly important issue. I acknowledge the contributions of my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) and of the hon. Members for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and for St. Ives (Mr. George) and the importance that education has for them as local Members of Parliament. I also acknowledge the sincerity with which they presented the issues to the House.

I am grateful for what I think was an acknowledgment of the Government's efforts and, equally important, of our good intentions. I cannot imagine that we will ever reach a point at which people will say, "Enough—no more for education." It is such an exciting issue, there is always so much to be done, and there are always so many frontiers to be pushed that, no matter what any Government do, it will always be claimed that we could do with more resources.

[Ms Estelle Morris]

I am inevitably going to talk about a record of which I am proud, but I do not for one minute pretend or claim that we have enough resources or that I as an education Minister or we as a Government should stop seeking more resources for education.

I know that the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell will expect me to remind him that during the period of the comprehensive spending review settlement, £19 billion extra will be spent on education. I am not a brilliant mathematician, but if one adds that sum to the £4 billion extra that we have already allocated, the total is far more than would have accrued from 1p on income tax over the same period.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: In real terms.

Ms Morris: It may be in real terms—but an average of £2 billion from 1p in income tax? The Liberal Democrats would be hard pushed to argue that we have not provided more than would have been gained from 1p on income tax.

Before responding to the points made in today's debate, I should like to acknowledge the high standards of education attainment in Cornish schools. I claim no credit for that, and I am sure that other hon. Members would not do so—it is down to the hard work of teachers, governors, parents, pupils and the wider community. I am delighted to acknowledge that key stage 2 results in the county are above the national average. In particular, I congratulate the secondary schools in Cornwall, whose results for pupils gaining five GCSE grades A to C are 5 per cent. above the average. Even more pleasing, that represents a 2 per cent. increase on last year, which is a faster than average growth for schools with pupils taking five GCSEs.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne would remind me that improvement across the county is not even, which is precisely why we have introduced initiatives such as the education action zones. We want to give more support to teachers who work in the most challenging social and academic environments. With no commitment, I shall of course look with interest at the application from her area to become an EAZ. I have had the opportunity to visit Cornwall as a Minister in the past 18 months, and I have been impressed by the commitment that I have seen.

I want to deal mainly with two issues. I want to talk about the money that comes through the standard spending assessment, and to offer some understanding and reassurance in that connection, and then to talk about the other money—it is not the bulk of it, but it is real money—that does not come through the SSA formula.

Since May 1997, we have increased Cornwall's SSA by £19 million, or 11 per cent. Those figures take into account the change in local authority functions. If we add to that the extra money that we have been able to distribute to local authorities by abolishing the nursery voucher scheme, which has gone into early-years provision, the increase is more than 11 per cent.

I shall deal in a moment with the figures that were cited, but Cornwall's primary SSA per pupil has increased by 11 per cent. in cash terms since we took office, and its secondary SSA has increased by 9 per cent. since May 1997. Funding per secondary pupil has increased by £110 in each of the past two years. In real terms, since we took office, we have increased SSA funding for primary pupils in Cornwall by 5.6 per cent., and the comparable real terms increase for secondary pupils in Cornwall is 3.5 per cent.

The figures quoted to the House were given in cash terms based on the SSA formula. The irony is that I am having to defend what was described as a growing gap in cash terms because we have put more money into education. We have not changed the formula under which the money is distributed so the more we put in, the greater the difference will be in cash terms. I suspect that had we reduced the amount in cash terms, the gap would have been smaller and the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell would not have sought an Adjournment debate because the gap would have narrowed and he would perhaps have congratulated us.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the formula is the problem. I am not going to justify a formula which, for no good reason, seems to treat children differently in different areas. I cannot fathom why that should be. However, I will defend a system that acknowledges that in different localities there are different legitimate needs and expenses. Unlike other hon. Members who have contributed to the debate, I do not represent a rural constituency, but I readily accept that transport costs are greater in rural areas.

When we come eventually to devise a fair SSA, it will never be an amount per head. We cannot come up with a formula on which everyone agrees, but I suspect that arguing for the average amount for children in Cornwall may not be in the long-term interests of Members representing the area. I caution them against arguing that too often.

I have answered several Adjournment debates, mainly initiated by Liberal Democrat Members, but not one has been used to argue that the SSA formula favours them too much and that they want to give up some money for colleagues. That means that some colleagues who care equally passionately about education have to accept a formula that favours them less—

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall) *rose—*

Ms Morris: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will excuse me for not giving way, but I have only three minutes left.

We tried in vain to change the formula for this year, but we could not get agreement. If political parties do not agree, we face a geographical alignment. We will not get two bites at the cherry, and we did not want to change the formula and get it wrong. We have agreed that, over the next three years, we will try to come up with a formula that is right. The hope that I offer the hon. Gentleman is an acknowledgement by a Minister that the formula is not fair and a determination that, with a bit of give and take and some realism from Members of all parties representing all geographical areas, we can improve it.

The other source of funding, which has not received much comment—probably because the Liberal Democrats think that we have done fairly well in this instance—is the standards fund. Thirteen million pounds has been allocated to Cornwall since the election. I know that hon. Members will welcome the £4,000 to each school for the purchase nationally of about 20 million books.

In the two minutes that I have left, I must stress that we have a good record on class sizes. We have allocated a grant of £760,000 to the county to reduce infant class sizes, and £1 million for capital work in that connection. I congratulate the local authority on coming up with a class-size plan which means that, whereas in 1998 4,362 infants were in classes of more than 30, in September 1999 only 362 will be. That is real progress in two years, progress that was previously undreamt of.

By giving several hon. Members the opportunity to contribute to the debate, I have inevitably not had the time to respond to all the points that were raised. However, it has been an important debate, and is one to which we shall no doubt return.

War Memorial (Romford)

1 pm

Mrs. Eileen Gordon (Romford): Civilians are helpless and random casualties of war, and too often their sacrifice and courage go unrecognised. That is why in Romford we want a memorial specifically recognising the civilian casualties of the second world war.

When I first became involved in the project, I could not have foreseen the pictures on our television screens, night after night, of civilians being driven from their country, Kosovo—people made refugees not because of anything that they have done, but because of who they are. Many have lost their lives—civilians placed on the front line through no wish or action of their own.

I detest the intolerance and violence that have led to such ethnic cleansing. It seems to me a failure of reason and a breakdown of civilisation, yet there are times when a tyrant will not reason or negotiate, and we must stand up against him. Thus it is in Kosovo, and thus it was in the second world war.

I have been to Remembrance day services and I am always moved by the depth of feeling, even so long after the world wars. The pain is still strong after 60 or even 80 years. It is right that we honour the service men and women who died in the second world war so that we might be free. It is also right that we honour the civilian casualties—people who tried against all the odds to live their lives as normally as possible in the extraordinary conditions of war. They tried to keep homes going for service men and women to return to after the war.

Almost 30,000 men, women and children died in the London blitz. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) and others for their work to get a civilian memorial park in London. There are such parks in Hiroshima and Coventry, and we should have one in London.

My own family were in London during the blitz. They kept being evacuated, but got homesick and always ended up back in London. My sister has described to me how she used to go up on to the roof of her flat and see the fires all around.

On the grand scale of things, one could say that Romford was lucky. On the worst night of the bombing, 55 people died in Romford. However, we are not talking about statistics. Each death was a unique tragedy, leaving scars for the rest of their lives on family, friends and witnesses who survived.

That worst night of bombing in Romford was the night of 19 April 1941. The first parachute bomb dropped at 9.40 pm; the bombing ended at 11 pm. By then, 55 people had been killed and many more injured. The youngest to die was one year old and the oldest was 73. Thirty-eight people died in one road—Essex road—and others in Brentwood road, Hillfoot avenue, Hillfoot road and Stanley road. Whole families were wiped out—the Wilson family, the Barclay family and the Limehouse family of Essex road. The Gill family in Brentwood road lost nine of its members.

There were many tragic stories from survivors. Joan Limehouse was the eldest daughter of her family and had gone out to buy fish and chips for the family supper. She was on her way there when the bombs dropped. By the time she reached home, there was nothing left of her house and she was an orphan.

[Mrs. Eileen Gordon]

A service man, Bill Barclay, received a telegram to tell him that his mother, cousin and three brothers had died on that awful night. Bill has said:

"I have always thought these are the forgotten people of the war. Every night I cry about it."

There are casualties of that night who have never been named and are "known only to God". Others could not be identified because of the force of the bombing, and 12 bodies were buried in four mass graves in Romford cemetery.

Essex road was left a pile of rubble, yet strangely, one wall survived and on that wall there was left hanging a picture, still in it usual place. It was hanging at a weird angle, but was completely unmouched by the carnage around it. That picture was of Christ—"The Light of the World", by Holman Hunt. It now hangs in St. John the Divine church in Mawney road in Romford, with a memorial book recording the names of the Essex road casualties, for in the week following the bombing, 34 of the funeral services were held in that church.

The priest at that church, Malcolm Griffin, wants a permanent memorial to the men, women and children who died that night. The aim is to erect a statue of Christ and a brass plaque recording the names of those who died, and a tribute to all civilians who have lost their lives in warfare.

Coincidentally, our local newspaper, the *Romford Recorder*, has taken up the same issue. It wants a memorial plaque incorporated into the street sign of Essex road and the other roads where bombs dropped on that April night. It also wants to place a bench in the cemetery where the unnamed victims are buried—a place to sit, reflect and remember. We are now all working to achieve that aim. Havering local authority is considering sympathetically the request for planning permission for the plaques on the street signs and has given us much support, which we welcome. The project will cost about £10,000.

This Sunday, a memorial service will be held in St. John's church to mark the anniversary of the bombing and to launch the campaign to have the memorials in place before the 60th anniversary in 2001. We will be asking local businesses and local people for funds, as this is indeed a community project. Already, surviving relatives have sent money to the *Romford Recorder* towards the fund. We would appreciate any support and advice that the Minister can give us about the funds that we can apply for, and about whether there are similar memorials around the country.

The aim is to make sure that the people who died that night are not forgotten by the community and by the young. When the *Romford Recorder* ran the story, many young people wrote in. Steven Halfteck, aged 10, wrote:

"Isn't it sad about all the people who died? We have been working about the bombing and we think you should have a memorial. If you did have a memorial we could remember the 55 people who died in the bombing."

It is important that we remember.

At the meeting of the council of the borough of Romford on Wednesday 21 May 1941, it was recorded in note 564 on air raid casualties that

"the Mayor expressed the sympathy of the Council with the relatives of persons killed in a recent Air Raid and the Council stood in silence for a short period."

Fifty-eight years later, on Sunday, our present mayor and councillors will do the same. We have not forgotten, but it is right that we should have a permanent memorial.

In conclusion, I quote from Winston G. Ramsey, the editor of "The Blitz Then and Now", who stated:

"Let not those who come after forget the victory won by the ordinary citizens of Britain. By their sacrifice of loved ones, they have earned the right to have their ordeal remembered in a fitting memorial."

That is what we are trying to do in Romford.

1.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. John Spellar): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) on obtaining a debate on an issue of such importance to her constituency, and on the very moving way in which she introduced it. No one can fail to recognise the strength of feeling in her community which came through very clearly in her speech.

The subject that my hon. Friend raises should certainly not give rise to contention in the House. The debate gives us all a great opportunity to recognise the debt of gratitude that we owe to those who served our country, and who were injured or died—and their families—as a result of two world wars, particularly the second world war, in which the incident to which she referred took place.

Each year, at Remembrance day ceremonies, both at the Cenotaph, which is attended by leading national figures, and war memorials across the country, we rightly pay tribute to those who fell. My hon. Friend rightly drew attention to her pride at attending her local ceremony, which reflects the view of many Members of Parliament, who proudly join their communities to remember those who have fallen in defence of this country, international freedom and world peace.

We all recognise that, naturally and understandably, such ceremonies have a predominantly military flavour; the armed forces bear the brunt of war—directly and often terribly. The names on most of the country's many war memorials are of men and women who served in the forces—either at home or, particularly, overseas—but we must never forget that war does not only affect those in uniform. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the civilian population made an invaluable contribution to the war effort during the second world war, as a result of which many lost their lives. I shall say more about that later. They, too, deserve our respect, and should be commemorated.

It was reported in a magazine article last year that it is Government policy that no further memorials of the second world war should be allowed to be erected. That report arose from an unfortunate misunderstanding concerning a village in East Anglia, and understandably caused great consternation not only in that small community, but among the wider readership of the church magazine. As a result, a number of hon. Members received letters from constituents, whose concerns I fully understand. Obviously, I have written to those hon. Members—to reassure them and, through them, their constituents.

I am very pleased to be able to take this opportunity to put paid to the rumour that the Government have imposed—or would even consider imposing—such a restriction. It would be quite contrary to our intentions

and fundamental beliefs. We are very happy to encourage further commemorative ventures. Indeed, I am pleased to say that several such projects are currently afoot, of which the one to which my hon. Friend referred is an extremely important example.

As some hon. Members may be aware, in December, the Prime Minister announced plans for a national memorial at Coventry cathedral. In some ways, Coventry suffered even more than London in the blitz, although it has, of course, been reconstructed following those horrific events. The memorial will honour those who worked on the home front—in the dockyards, shipyards and factories, down the mines, in transport, on the land, and in many other areas in maintaining daily life and sustaining the war effort.

Mrs. Gordon: The proposed plaques on street signs would represent a very simple, dignified recognition of the bombing. The streets have, of course, been repaired; one would not think that anything had happened. Essex road has been returned to its state before the bombing. We want to commemorate the bombing to let the people who live there know what happened, and so that the young will always remember.

Mr. Spellar: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Although the physical scars of the bombing may have been removed, mental scars among families and communities are still apparent. I was very pleased to hear of her local authority's concern and encouragement, and its favourable indications that that awful night will be remembered on the street signs. That is important, and ties in very well with the church's proposal, with which I shall deal later. My hon. Friend also drew attention to the enormously encouraging interest among many youngsters in this country's history—how their grandparents stood up against totalitarianism and fascism, and the suffering that they endured.

As well as commemorating the service of those who worked on the home front, the memorial will commend their self-sacrifice to future generations. I am so pleased that schools are taking that up. I am also pleased to say that a campaign is under way to raise funds for a memorial to the women of the second world war, which will commemorate those who served in civilian roles as well as in the armed forces.

I turn to the specific subject of civilians who were killed during the war. More than 60,000 United Kingdom civilians lost their lives as a result of enemy action during the second world war. As my hon. Friend pointed out, 30,000 of those were killed in the London blitz alone—quite apart from all those who were injured during those awful attacks. Men, women and children of all ages and all walks of life lost their lives, as the bombing in Romford represents.

Since the end of that war, more than 120 memorials have been erected to the memory of civilians who were killed. Understandably, many of them are in London and on the approaches to the capital—both of which suffered terrible losses during enemy bombing raids. A plaque was recently installed at St. Paul's cathedral, commemorating those who were killed in the blitz. The people of Romford are therefore seeking to follow a well-established, admirable and honourable tradition.

As we have learned from my hon. Friend, a parachute mine was dropped over Essex road and the surrounding roads in Romford on the night of 19 April 1941. In Essex road alone, it demolished 17 houses, and 38 civilians were killed. Of those, 34 were identified, and their funerals were held at St. John's church, Romford the following week. Other roads were similarly affected; as my hon. Friend said, a total of 55 people died in the locality. The names of the 34 people who were identified are inscribed in a book of remembrance that is kept in the church.

I read with interest and humility the information that has been prepared by the vicar of St. John's church. It is impossible not to be moved by it; my hon. Friend's speech demonstrated that better than I can. A dreadful toll was extracted from that one road: 38 people were killed in one night and several families lost as many as five members. Nearly a third of the dead were children. The effect on what was, no doubt, a tightly-knit and supportive community must have been devastating and, indeed, lasting, which has been shown by the response from Romford.

It is important to say that, although the great conurbations—London and the west midlands are the two I know best—may appear to be great, amorphous sprawls to people who live outside them, they contain a mixture of local communities, many of which include families who have lived there for many generations. The impact of such incidents on local communities in those areas is as great as it would be on more isolated villages and towns across the country. It is right that we remember that, which is why this particular venture is so much to be encouraged.

As my hon. Friend said, amidst the rubble, a reproduction of Holman Hunt's famous painting "The Light of the World" survived, and still survives, in St. John's church. A passage quoted from "Ordeal in Romford" says that

"in a sea of devastation, 'The Light of the World' remained—a reminder and a challenge".

I find it heartening that, 58 years after that tragic event, the people of Romford have kept the reminder and risen to the challenge. They clearly still have their civilian war dead very much in their minds, and are setting about doing something to ensure that their memory will be perpetuated.

The people of Romford are also to be commended in that the proposed memorial will extend beyond local loss of life and will pay tribute to all civilians who lost their lives in warfare. The service of commemoration, which is to take place at St. John's church this Sunday, will also be an act of prayer for peace in the world.

As hon. Members will know, it has long been the policy of successive Governments that war memorials should be erected following a public appeal for donations, rather than provided by Government funds. That is because the Government receive many requests—from individuals, groups and organisations—for assistance to fund war memorials. It would be neither fair nor possible or practicable to support one application and not another.

Public subscription also has the advantage of being a way in which the people of this country can make a direct and unmistakeable demonstration of their respect for those who lost their lives. That is what my hon. Friend and the community that she represents are proposing, and the venture has the Government's warmest approval and support. I welcome this opportunity to wish the organisers every success with their fundraising activities.

I also welcome the support from the local paper, the *Romford Recorder*, which will stimulate further interest in the campaign. I look forward to hearing of progress

[Mr. Spellar]

and my Department would be more than happy to provide the organisers with advice on fundraising, about which my hon. Friend inquired, and to offer representation at any dedication ceremony when the memorial is in place.

I join my hon. Friend, on behalf of the whole House, in paying our respects to the memory of the civilian war dead of Romford and in expressing our admiration for those who are undertaking this most worthwhile venture to perpetuate their memory.

Green Lanes

1.23 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): It has been said:

"I welcome the opportunity provided by the debate to return to a subject that I have raised with successive Ministers during the course of several years. I do so without apology because the subject is important in its own right and of increasing concern to many people. I refer to the appalling damage inflicted each year on hundreds of miles of the unmetalled green lanes of our countryside."—[*Official Report*, 17 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 1426.]

I acknowledge that it may be regarded as the height of vanity to quote oneself, but that is how I started my previous Adjournment debate on this subject, nearly four years ago. I have repeated those words today because, tragically, the situation has not improved in key respects. Sections of the country's green lanes are being extensively damaged through misuse by modern vehicles.

The process of reclassifying public rights of way under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has, at the very least, been profoundly unsatisfactory. Clarification is urgently needed, and has been for some time. More than that, there is growing consensus that we need to adopt a wider land management approach to our green lanes and the countryside through which they pass—an approach that goes beyond merely classifying user rights.

Without doubt, some of the damage to our green lanes is caused by agricultural vehicles—perhaps a considerable amount. Much of it is caused by 4x4s and other recreational vehicles. In parenthesis, I acknowledge that national organisations representing the interests of 4x4 drivers and many 4x4 clubs are environmentally aware and operate extremely responsibly.

My first substantive point is that the root cause of much of the misuse by vehicles of our green lanes in recent times has been, and remains, the reclassification process under the 1981 Act. In 1996, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), who was then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, registered concern that legal dedication of vehicular rights was being established on the back of wrong advice from a number of highway authorities.

In the then Government's opinion, some highway authorities were misconstruing the 1981 Act. The present Government, as I understand the situation, have followed suit. In July 1997, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions issued guidance in the form of a legal view that it is unlawful for vehicles to use roads used as public paths—RUPPs—unless vehicular rights have been established in accordance with the Road Traffic Act 1988. In Stevens *v.* the Secretary of State, of 16 January 1998, the High Court, on appeal, upheld that position. There is a presumption of only bridleway and lower rights attaching to RUPPs, unless and until higher rights have been shown to exist.

However, the judgment in the Stevens appeal went on to say that recent vehicular use could be used as supporting evidence of historic rights and that to rule vehicular rights out before the matter of historical rights had been determined would be to prejudge the issue. That second part of the judgment has complicated rather than resolved matters, because there is now considerable debate and uncertainty over whether it is illegal to drive on a RUPP unless it has been proved that there are historic

vehicular rights and whether it is legal to drive on a RUPP until it has been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that there are no vehicular rights.

In other words, what should be straightforward criminal proceedings can become complex civil matters. It is therefore no wonder that reclassification under the 1981 Act appears to have stalled in some counties. I submit that it is imperative that the issue is clarified. My own position is that I support those who vigorously argue that vehicular use of RUPPs should be illegal unless or until historic vehicular rights have been proved.

Secondly, I turn to a related point: the Countryside Commission's objective 8, which is to reclassify all RUPPs and unclassified country roads as a new category of byways. I share the concerns expressed by the Country Landowners Association in its submission to the Countryside Commission, and by the environmental group Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement, known as GLEAM, and others.

I argue that this proposal is a step in the wrong direction. If implemented, it would create vehicular rights over many routes where such rights do not currently exist. It would extend the potential to inflict damage on our green lanes. We know perfectly well from the process of reclassification under the 1981 Act that many RUPPs sustain bridleway rights, not vehicular rights. The proposal would extend vehicular rights to hundreds of RUPPs for the first time. Much the same line of argument applies to the unclassified county roads. In a letter dated 24 August 1998, which was generally circulated, the Department confirmed that the status of individual UCRs must be established on a case-by-case basis. Many UCRs are nothing more than unsealed minor tracks. Most important, a significant number of UCRs have been held, after public inquiry, not to carry vehicular rights.

If UCRs and RUPPs are to constitute a new category of byways, vehicular rights will also apply to them. The Countryside Commission's objective 8, if implemented, would expose more of our green lanes to misuse by vehicles. I greatly hope that the Government will, in due course, accept the Country Landowners Association's recommendation that, instead of the objective 8 reclassification, all RUPPs and UCRs should be shown on definitive maps as bridleways.

I want to refer to the management of byways open to all traffic where vehicular rights exist. Some of my hon. Friends feel instinctively uneasy when they hear the word "regulations", and I am not unsympathetic to that point of view. However, there is a strong case for national regulations to regulate the use of byways open to all traffic. The Minister will note that my remarks again reflect the CLA position. National regulations could restrict use to motor vehicles below a certain weight and fitted with flotation tyres, apply a speed limit to all motor vehicles, ban use by motor vehicles during winter months, perhaps, although controversially, make exceptions to enable continued use by agricultural and forestry vehicles if they are part of the ordinary traffic of the neighbourhood, and require all restrictions on use to be shown on signs on all BOATs where they meet other highways carrying vehicular rights.

In the context of preserving such byways, it can also be argued that two changes to local traffic regulation orders are desirable. One of those changes would be to provide that such orders can override any national regulations on BOATs by adding or removing specific preservations in relation to specific byways and specific types of traffic.

A second change would be to widen the grounds for making traffic regulation orders to include avoiding disturbance to livestock, game or wildlife, and protecting flora, fauna, geological, geomorphological or physiographical features. That proposal highlights the need to consider the sustainability of rights of way not only to maintain their surfaces, but—and I emphasise this point—for their wider wildlife and environmental value.

I welcome the fact that the Minister for the Environment, in a written answer on 5 February 1998, emphasised that wider dimension. He also referred to the Government publication "Making the Best of Byways", which he described as

"a practical guide to managing vehicles on byways".—[*Official Report*, 5 February 1998; Vol. 305, c. *730*.]

It is unfortunate that "Making the Best of Byways", at least in the opinion of some people who follow these issues closely, is misleading in key respects. First, the booklet states that its focus

"is upon unsealed ways which carry public vehicular rights. These include: roads used as public paths (RUPPs) (where rights of way for vehicles exist)."

As it stands, that is highly ambiguous. The last phrase in brackets could be taken as asserting that vehicular rights exist on all RUPPs, which is not the case. As has been pointed out to the Government on a number of occasions, the ambiguity would be removed if that phrase were corrected to read "in cases where rights of way for vehicles exist." I find it hard to understand the Government's reluctance to issue such a correction.

Secondly, among the unsealed ways that carry public vehicular rights the booklet lists

"routes formerly defined as unclassified county roads".

Surely the Government are mistaken. Some years ago, the Secretary of State, in the Cumbria decision, held that the term "UCR" was only administrative. In the letter of 24 August 1998 to which I have referred, the Department acknowledged that the status of UCRs should be established on a case-by-case basis, and, most important, that a significant number of UCRs had been held, after public inquiry, not to carry vehicular rights. In the light of that, it is hard to understand why the Government assert that UCRs carry public vehicular rights.

Thirdly, some argue that the Government are adding further confusion to this complicated issue by inventing a new definition of the word "byway". According to the booklet,

"this word byway has been used in the guide to cover all three classes"—

that is RUPPs, BOATs and UCRs. I use the term "green lanes". Over the years, there has been a Government-led convention that the word "byway" should be the accepted abbreviation for byways open to all traffic. It is argued that it is a dubious practice suddenly to give the word a new and wider meaning.

As time is short in these Adjournment debates, I have been obliged to be ultra-selective. I have touched on only some of the key issues. We can be sure that the problems will intensify and damage to our green lanes will continue unless effective action is taken.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Hear, hear.

Mr. Hunter: I note the approval of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), who follows these issues

[Mr. Hunter]

in detail. I hope that the Minister will consider these issues seriously. The preservation of our ancient green lanes demands positive action with minimum further delay, and I look forward to the Minister's reply.

1.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on securing a debate on a subject in which I know he is interested, and has been interested for a long time. We are aware of the concern about damage to green lanes as a result of inappropriate use by motor vehicles, not only from the hon. Gentleman's efforts but from letters from hon. Members on behalf of their constituents, from the early-day motion—mentioned by the hon. Gentleman—tabled by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), who I am happy to see is present, and from media reports.

Let me say a little about the legislation on rights of way, and local authorities' duties and powers. The term "green lane" is not recognised in law, but it is usually acknowledged to cover all unsurfaced tracks in the countryside. Not all such tracks carry vehicular rights. Some green lanes carry rights only for those on foot, some for those on foot and on horseback, and some carry no public rights at all, being for private use only.

Public rights of way are recorded on definitive maps. If a way is shown on such a map, that constitutes conclusive evidence of the public rights along the way. Local authorities—usually county councils, which involve two tiers—are responsible for definitive maps. They are required to keep the maps under continuous review to amend them when missing rights, or errors in previously recorded information, are identified.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Does a definitive map always constitute conclusive evidence? I have had numerous problems in this connection in my constituency, and representations have been made to Derbyshire county council. Is it really the case that, when a bridleway is included in a definitive map, that is it? The Trail Riders Fellowship wants to be able to provide facilities for its members to ride bikes on lanes, and intends to challenge the authority of definitive maps, but it is proving difficult to persuade the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to act.

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that the legal definition of a right of way is what appears on a definitive map, but I am the first to acknowledge that there can be—and often are, in specific areas—differences of opinion on the names that should be given to rights of way.

The rights-of-way network in England amounts to some 169,000 km, or 105,000 miles, and represents an important recreational resource. Footpaths make up about 78 per cent. of the network; bridleways, for people on foot, on horseback and on bicycles, make up about 17 per cent., and byways open to all traffic, or BOATs—a rather unusual acronym, given that we are discussing routes for people on foot, on horseback, on cycles and in or on vehicles—make up 3 per cent. BOATs are intended mainly for use by horse riders and walkers, but vehicular uses have the right to use them. It should be borne in mind that the description of vehicular users extends beyond motorised traffic. BOATs provide a valuable network of off-road routes for horse-drawn vehicles. The remaining 2 per cent. of routes are currently classified as roads used as public paths.

The duty to record rights of way arose principally from the National Parks and Access to Countryside Act 1949. Under that Act, local authorities were required to record as roads used as public paths—RUPPs—not only footpaths and bridleways, but ways which, while carrying public vehicular rights, were used principally as footpaths and bridleways. The term "RUPP" was misunderstood, however—perhaps because the Act and the accompanying instructions were not sufficiently clear about the ways that they were intended to record.

The Countryside Act 1968 introduced provisions to deal with those misunderstandings, but again the provisions were applied inconsistently, and problems—albeit different problems—occurred. The legislation was reviewed again in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981—on which the hon. Member for Basingstoke made his opinion clear—and provisions were introduced to require local authorities to resolve the legal uncertainty that had grown up over the years about the rights that could be exercised on RUPPs. Local authorities were to review and reclassify RUPPs as footpaths, bridleways or BOATs, depending on the rights that local authorities found to exist.

That reclassification exercise is itself misunderstood. Let me emphasise that no new rights have been created as a consequence; instead, there is certainty about the rights that already existed. One consequence of the 1981 Act was the separation of the issue of rights from management measures available to local authorities to ensure that inappropriate use of ways—footpaths, bridleways or BOATs—does not occur.

Reclassification is not an easy task. It rests largely on historic documentary evidence that was not drawn up for the purpose, and sometimes evidence is or appears to be conflicting. The quality of evidence differs from case to case and from area to area, and, in many instances, must be seen in the local context.

Some authorities have reviewed and reclassified all their RUPPs; others have some way to go. In 1997 authorities in England made some 86 reclassification orders, only a few of which appeared to cause difficulties. Many of the ways reclassified as BOATs see few or no vehicles; some are capable of sustaining vehicular use with no detriment to the enjoyment of others.

It has been argued that ways that were created for the use of cars and carriages 100 or more years ago should not now be open to motor vehicles. I sympathise with that view, but the modern road network evolved in part from the network established in past centuries. When rights that have not been exercised are shown to exist, there is a case for recording them. The question that then needs to be addressed is whether those rights—or any others, if exercised—are likely to cause damage.

That brings into play another key element of local authorities' responsibilities for the rights-of-way network. They are also responsible for ensuring that the use of rights of way is regulated, and is not inappropriate. They can do that by means of their powers to make traffic regulation orders. Such orders can be made for a variety

of reasons, but, in the context of today's debate, the most relevant criteria are those preventing use by vehicular traffic of a kind or in a manner that is unsuitable, having regard to the character of the way and to preserving the character of the way in cases in which it is especially suitable for use by persons on horseback or on foot. Using those powers, local authorities can regulate use for all or some users for all the year, or at times when ways are vulnerable.

Traffic regulation orders, however, have incurred some criticism as a management tool to protect rights of way, and there may be a case for changing local authorities' powers in that regard. Last year, we announced our intention to consider whether the scope for the making of orders should be widened to include nature and landscape conservation. Also last year, we published our document "Making the Best of Byways". I am sorry that the hon. Member for Basingstoke does not share our view that it constitutes a practical guide to management of the use of vehicles on public rights of way.

The guide was prepared with the help of groups representing landowners, farmers, users and local authorities. It is intended to assist and encourage the development of clear management strategies for unsealed ways, and to set out measures that can be taken to protect them as a resource and to benefit a wide range of users.

The hon. Gentleman expressed concern about the introduction to the guide. The guide does not state that all RUPPs carry vehicular rights. To be included in it, ways must be unsealed and also carry vehicular rights. The sub-set in the document includes some RUPPs, some BOATs and some routes formerly defined as UCRs. Excluded from the sub-set are RUPPs that are sealed, RUPPs that do not carry vehicular rights and BOATs and former UCRs that are sealed. The guide goes on to say that rights of way in the sub-set, which for the purposes of the guide are referred to as byways, are available to all users. As all the ways in the sub-set carry vehicular rights by definition, that is true. The guide does not seek to redefine terms used in legislation, or the rights associated with particular statutory definitions.

Nevertheless, we are aware that there is considerable concern about rights of way. The concern is not only about protecting green lanes, or reclassifying RUPPs, but about procedures for the whole network. Last year, the Countryside Commission—as it was then—set out its proposals in a document entitled "Rights of Way in the 21st Century", which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Basingstoke, and which the commission used as the basis for discussions with national organisations with an interest in rights of way.

Much interest was expressed in the commission's proposals on the objective of promoting a more effective approach to managing vehicular use of rights of way. The strong responses were an indication of the feelings on the matter. Some people interpreted the commission's proposals as an attempt to increase the number and length of routes that may be used by vehicles. However, that was not the proposals' objective—which was to achieve greater clarity over the rights that may be exercised on rights of way.

Following its discussions, the Countryside Commission has made its recommendations for change in "Rights Of Way in the 21st Century, Conclusions and Recommendations", which was published last month. The commission concluded that it was essential to establish clear arrangements to replace the current system, and made several recommendations to that effect. It noted the interest shown in vehicular rights and the antipathy often shown towards any motorised use. It proposed that the Government should invite the new Countryside Agency to establish a working group of representatives of the main organisations with an interest in vehicular use of rights of way to identify and agree specific proposals for improving both the management and recording of byways.

On 8 March, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced that the Government would be proposing changes to the legislation and procedures on rights of way, as part of our package of measures to give people more freedom to enjoy the countryside. Before reaching conclusions on the details, we are considering the Countryside Commission's recommendations and will be consulting shortly.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Basingstoke for raising the issue. The debate is timely in the light of our recent announcements and our commitment to change.

Mr. Hunter: May I ask the hon. Lady to extend her comments to the suggestion that I made on national management regulations? Does she see scope for those within the Government's thinking?

Ms Jackson: As I have already told the House, we shall shortly be going out to consultation on the matter. In the light of what the hon. Gentleman has just said, however, I shall pass on his concerns to my right hon. Friend. It is always possible—whatever the consultation document, and regardless of whether a particular idea is defined by Government—for recipients of the document, and others who wish to respond to it, to offer their own ideas on how our approach in addressing any specific issue may be improved.

As I said, we shall shortly be seeking views from the public and interested organisations on our proposals. Today's debate will be a contribution to the forthcoming wider debate on the procedures and processes for the network as a whole.

It being before Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister was asked—

Parliamentary Ombudsman

1. **Dr. Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): What plans he has to review the operation of the parliamentary ombudsman system. [80292]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): I announced to the House on 30 March that the Government were about to undertake a review of the organisation of public sector ombudsmen in England. The review, which will cover the parliamentary ombudsman system, has now commenced and is being conducted by a team in the Cabinet Office.

Dr. Wright: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that, when the ombudsman system was set up 30 years ago by a Labour Government to protect the citizen against abuses by the state, it was a major innovation, opposed by the Conservative Opposition of the day? Is it not time to review and modernise the system? Citizens should not have to go through Members of Parliament to gain access to the ombudsman system. That is not the case with the local government ombudsman or the health service ombudsman. All public bodies should be inside the scheme.

Dr. Cunningham: I agree with my hon. Friend. I recently announced the extension of the scheme to include a large number of additional public bodies. The review will be wide ranging. I am sure that the observations of my hon. Friend and others will be taken into account.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Can the parliamentary ombudsman also investigate complaints from Members of Parliament? Many hon. Members on both sides are concerned about the fact that, although the Cabinet Office promised us a Freedom of Information Bill, we have heard nothing about it. Will the ombudsman be allowed to investigate that?

Dr. Cunningham: I did not realise that the hon. Gentleman had suddenly been overcome by political deafness. If he has not heard about the draft Freedom of Information Bill and its progress, he must be the only Member of Parliament who has not.

People's Panel (Public Health)

2. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): What research has been conducted through the people's panel into the delivery of public health in deprived communities; and if he will make a statement. [80293]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): Research was published last October, which included questions on the public's satisfaction with general practitioners and NHS hospitals and on people's priorities for improving health.

Mr. Mitchell: Given the value of the information from the people's panel in emphasising the problems of deprivation in health and changing the targets in "Our Healthier Nation", will that information be used in determining the location and curriculum of new medical schools? Hull university is applying to establish a new medical school that will place particular emphasis on primary care and deprivation in health.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am glad to agree with my hon. Friend in his reference to the input made by the people's panel to "Our Healthier Nation". I shall draw his comments on medical facilities outside the normal run of things, particularly in universities, to the attention of the appropriate Ministers.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the Minister look into the fact that there is a high incidence of smoking in most deprived communities and that the people who were polled expressed concerns about the relationship between the cost of smoking and improvements in health? One Department is responsible for the tax on cigarettes and another is responsible for dealing with the health problems caused by cigarettes. Will somebody—it might be the people's panel or the Cabinet Office—try to ensure that our tax policies are less in the interests of the Exchequer and more in the interests of improving the health of the public?

Mr. Kilfoyle: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the aim of the people's panel is to feed information through to policy making so that we reflect people's priorities. He will be pleased to know that one of the driving forces behind the recent White Paper on modernising government was the joined-up, strategic policy making and the joined-up delivery that reflects the nature of his question. He will also appreciate the work that has been piloted by the social exclusion unit to take forward that joined-up approach.

Commissioner for Public Appointments

3. **Mr. Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): If he will make a statement on the work of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. [80294]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): The Commissioner for Public Appointments, Dame Rennie Fritchie, is independent of Government. She publishes a code of practice on making public appointments based on merit, audits Departments' application of her code, and investigates complaints for public bodies within her remit.

Mr. Vaz: I welcome the steps that the Government have taken to increase the diversity in their public appointments. However, does the Minister agree that there is still a lack of awareness among the public as to how those appointments are made? Will he ensure that the new

commissioner advertises vacancies and potential vacancies as widely as possible to ensure that the pool from which the appointments are made includes the widest possible cross-section of people?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important that we be able to draw on the widest possible range of experience. Only yesterday, I had similar discussions with the appropriate committee in respect of the appointment of magistrates in the Duchy of Lancaster area. It is essential that everyone should have the opportunity to volunteer for the public services that are so important to us all.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the commissioner take into account the political allegiance of those who are appointed? Will the right hon. Gentleman publish a list of those who have not been reappointed in the past two years and those who have and their political allegiance? Will the good lady have the chance to consider the appointment of the director-general of the BBC in that context?

Dr. Cunningham: As the hon. Gentleman knows, all public appointments are subject to the Nolan rules. As I am sure that the hon. Gentleman also knows—but for the removal of any doubt, I will remind him—that the appointment of the director-general of the BBC is a matter exclusively for the governors of the corporation.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): It was a pleasure to see my right hon. Friend in the city of Lancaster yesterday to discuss public appointments on his very first visit as the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. What impression did he glean from his meetings with the business and scientific community in that most glorious city?

Dr. Cunningham: It is indeed a pleasure to tell my hon. Friend that I very much enjoyed my first visit to his constituency and to the city of Lancaster to meet leading city councillors and business people and to visit Lancaster university, which I am delighted to say is one of the top 10 universities in the country in terms of its teaching and research performance.

Policy Co-ordination (Elderly People)

4. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What steps he has taken to co-ordinate the work of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretaries of State for Social Security and for Health in relation to services for the elderly. [80295]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): Co-ordinating mechanisms are provided through the Home and Social Affairs Cabinet Committee and the inter-ministerial group on older people. Our "Listening to Older People" events, which begin next month, will provide us with feedback on whether older people think that we have got our priorities right.

Dr. Cable: I express some appreciation that an effort is being made to achieve joined-up government in those matters. Will the inter-ministerial group take account of the evidence that has been accumulated by the Royal College of Nursing, Age Concern and others that, as a result of resource constraints and rationing, particularly in the national health service and associated services, elderly people are increasingly facing discrimination purely on grounds of their age?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We take into account all the information that is disseminated during each of our meetings. That is a fine example of how the Government are partnering all sectors—including the voluntary sector and the private sector—in our deliberations and in the pilot schemes.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): As the Minister for the Cabinet Office co-ordinates the work of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Health in the interests of the elderly, can he shed some light on the extra £500 million a year that the NHS has been told to find to fund extra pension costs? When the Secretary of State got the extra money from the Treasury last July, did he know that he would have to find that sum? If he did, why has it come as a shock to the NHS? The chief executive of the NHS Confederation was reported in Monday's edition of *The Guardian* as saying:

"I have simply never heard of it before."

Is that not another stealth tax on the NHS, reducing the sum available for patient care?

Mr. Kilfoyle: There are two simple answers to the right hon. Gentleman. First, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office does an excellent co-ordinating job wherever he is called upon to take that role. Secondly, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that £21 billion extra has gone into the NHS this year.

Anti-drugs Policy

5. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on the progress of the Government's anti-drugs policy. [80296]

10. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): When he intends to publish the United Kingdom anti-drugs co-ordinator's first annual report and national plan. [80301]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): The strategy was launched in April last year. The first annual report and national plan will be published shortly.

Mr. Bercow: Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, out of 130 drug offenders referred for assessment for drug treatment and testing orders within the three pilot areas, only 38 have so far been sentenced to such orders? If those figures are accurate, would the right hon. Gentleman agree that available resources might be better channelled into law enforcement measures, thereby providing a more effective deterrent?

Dr. Cunningham: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's latter point. As the Government have made clear—and as I repeated in the autumn when I announced the allocation of a further £217 million to the work—we want to shift the burden of resources away from dealing

with the symptoms of drug abuse into prevention, treatment and education. That is what we shall do. I cannot confirm the numbers to which the hon. Gentleman referred in the first part of his question, but I will look into them and write to him.

Mr. Winterton: Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that the first annual report of the co-ordinator will reassure the people of this country that successful prosecutions are being introduced to deal with people who possess drugs and, even more than that, that the pedlars in death—those who deal in drugs—will be treated most severely, so that the cancer in our society of drug dealing and drug possession is dealt with positively and aggressively?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) is well briefed by my officials, the Government's drugs tsar and others on the work that we are developing. I know that the hon. Gentleman is closely involved in work on those matters in his constituency. The simple test of the number of prosecutions of people found in possession of drugs is not necessarily the best way to judge the performance of the policy. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must focus more on breaking up the drug-dealing rings, the drug providers and the importers of drugs, rather than simply picking up the young, innocent victims on the streets.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Since legally prescribed methadone causes as many, if not more, deaths as heroin when it is misused on the streets, does my right hon. Friend agree with the latest report by the National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths that we should look again at the way in which methadone is prescribed? Does he agree with Drugs North-West and others who believe that the Department of Health should look at the licensing of safer alternatives such as levo-methadone, which can be given at 50 per cent. dose, with 50 per cent. of the risk?

Dr. Cunningham: I will study the report with care, and I acknowledge the important work of my hon. Friend as vice-chairman of the all-party drugs misuse group. To illustrate how much we emphasise the importance that we give to those points, I should point out that, this week, I had a meeting with pharmacists on the very issue of the prescription and dispensing of methadone.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the Minister think that the present laws on the use of medicinal cannabis by those people who suffer from chronic pain and the foul side effects of chemotherapy are sensible? Is it sensible to send such people to prison, as has happened in the past three months in two instances? Mr. Eric Mann is serving a 12-month prison sentence. He is an intelligent adult who has committed a crime—in the eyes of the law—without a victim. He grew his own cannabis and did not use the illegal market. He decided to use the only medicine that gives him relief from chronic pain. The Government, to their great credit, have decided to hold experiments in the use of medicinal cannabis, so why can we not have an amnesty until we establish that the world's most ancient medicine is effective for medicinal use?

Dr. Cunningham: I am pleased that my hon. Friend has acknowledged that the Government await the outcome of the inquiry into the medicinal uses of cannabis. However, it is not possible for me or any other Minister to take executive action to set aside the due processes of the law while that study is taking place.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Bearing in mind that one of the main planks of the Government's anti-drug strategy is—rightly—education, what assessment has the Minister or the anti-drugs co-ordinator made of the effectiveness of anti-drug programmes run by local education authorities, compared with those run by life education centres or Drug Abuse Resistance Education—DARE? Does he agree that the emphasis in all anti-drug education should be not merely damage limitation but proactive resistance to the taking of drugs?

Dr. Cunningham: I very much agree with the latter point. As for the hon. Lady's former point, a wide variety of drug education schemes are run and we do not prescribe what those schemes should be. As she will know, some are provided by voluntary organisations. I am considering with my colleagues in the Department for Education and Employment how we can improve drugs education in schools, but the principal objective must be to persuade young people that it is not in their interest to get involved in drugs in the first place.

Government Service Delivery (One-stop Shops)

6. **Jacqui Smith** (Redditch): What plans he has to promote one-stop shops for Government services. [80297]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The "Modernising Government" White Paper, launched on 30 March, contains a number of initiatives to encourage joint working between central and local government, including one-stop shops. There will be a drive to eliminate obstacles to joined-up working, including a more co-ordinated approach to property management, and a second round of the invest-to-save budget to fund new projects that involve partnership working.

Jacqui Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, especially the emphasis on co-ordination between central and local government. Can he assure me that central Government will be willing to learn from best practice in local authorities, such as that undertaken by Redditch borough council, which is setting up a one-stop shop and working with local partners such as the county council, the police, the citizens advice bureau and the Employment Service? The council is also incorporating automatic information systems to deal with local people's inquiries in one visit. Will central Government be willing to undertake the necessary investment in technology to enable local people to access central Government services and information in the Redditch one-stop shop?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We recognise that service delivery is undertaken as much by local authorities as by national Government Departments or their agencies. To that end, we are working closely with the local authorities which have been part of the process of devising the White Paper from the outset. I recently launched the infoshop pilots, which are being tested in 16 different local authorities.

They perform the functions that my hon. Friend would like to see in local authorities throughout the land. That is the subject of the White Paper.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): What are the Government doing towards employing information technology—which can make one-stop shops a reality—to join up the various services? Has the Minister ever pretended to be an ordinary member of the public and telephoned his Department to get information? An audit exercise such as that would help him to assess how easy it is to get information from his Department.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Yes, we audit how effective the Cabinet Office is in responding to people's inquiries, regardless of whether they are Members of Parliament or members of the public. The White Paper "Modernising Government" contained a technology component, and we have taken two important and basic steps towards its implementation. For the first time, we have looked towards establishing an information technology strategy for the whole of Government. We have also insisted that a senior person of board level in each Department be appointed to drive through the implementation of new technology and to monitor its effect on the delivery of services.

Better Regulation Unit (Liquor Licensing Report)

7. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will make a statement concerning the better regulation unit's report on liquor licensing. [80298]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The Government's response of 29 October 1998 welcomed the task force report. The Home Office is committed to acting on the report's short-term recommendations and has launched a wider review of liquor licensing to examine the long-term recommendations.

Mr. Grogan: Does my hon. Friend agree that the experience in Scotland over the past 25 years of a more flexible system of regulation of the opening and closing hours of public houses reinforces the need for modernisation of the laws in England and Wales? As Allan Charlesworth, the serving police officer who chaired the better regulation working party pointed out, closing all the pubs at 11 pm means that large numbers of people spill out on to the streets at the same time, which increases the chances of public disorder.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I certainly agree that there is a lot to be learned from the experience in Scotland and elsewhere. The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who is charged with handling the report, is examining those lessons in great detail. They will be applied, in both the short and the long terms, when licensing hours are reviewed.

Biotechnology

8. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): When he and fellow Ministers expect to take action following the report by officials on biotechnology and genetic modification. [80299]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): Ministers will consider the report, to be submitted by officials, in parallel with the conclusions of the Government's public consultation on developments in the biosciences. I expect to make a formal announcement of the outcome of the review shortly.

Sir Sydney Chapman: In the past 200 years, the world's population has increased from 1 billion to 6 billion; three quarters of the world's population is at present undernourished, or worse; and the most conservative estimates show that the world's population will increase by another 4 billion over the next 50 years. Given all that, does the Minister accept that, providing scientists can show beyond doubt that genetically modified crops and foods are safe, the use of such crops and foods will probably be the only way to ensure that the future population of the world will not starve?

Dr. Cunningham: I am satisfied that, with proper control and tests and trials before licences are granted, the production of genetically modified food can make a significant contribution to the problem of feeding an ever-growing world population. I would not say that it represents the only solution, but it can certainly be a major factor for good in that regard.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As a former beekeeper, and pursuant to Question 22, may I ask what advice my right hon. Friend has been given on the distance that bees can fly—their range? What effects will that range have on the cross-pollination of genetically modified crops?

Dr. Cunningham: I have always known that my hon. Friend packed a considerable sting, but we cannot declare a no-fly zone for bees. Therefore, we are devoting considerable research into the matter of cross-pollination so that we can be sure that difficulties to do with hybridisation will not arise. The experience shows that it is not really a significant problem—in north America that experience is wide ranging.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the right hon. Gentleman place in the Library a list of those laboratories that the Government recognise as able to validate the genetically modified or non-genetically modified status of processed foods?

Dr. Cunningham: I am not sure whether we have a list of all the laboratories that would be involved, but I shall certainly provide the hon. Lady and the House with all the information that is available to me.

Public Appointments

9. **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): If he will make a statement on his plans to improve the procedures for access to public appointments, indicating when the new procedures are likely to be introduced. [80300]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The Government are committed to ensuring that access to public appointments provides equality of opportunity for all and will shortly publish departmental action plans.

Dr. Naysmith: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. In introducing those new procedures, will the Government

bear in mind the unconscionable amount of time sometimes taken to fill appointments, that is, between the declaration of a vacancy and the making of the appointment?

Mr. Kilfoyle: When delays occur, I suspect that part of the reason is the insistence on finding the right person for the appointment. All such appointments are dictated by merit but, in the light of my hon. Friend's comments, I undertake to reconsider the matter.

Political Advisers

13. **Mr. Bob Russell** (Colchester): How many political advisers have been appointed by Government Departments since 1 May 1979; how many have left; and how many are employed. [80304]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): There are 67 special advisers in post. Since 1 May 1997, 28 special advisers have left the civil service, either as a result of resignation or because their contracts were terminated following ministerial changes.

Mr. Russell: Why do the Government need so many political advisers?

Dr. Cunningham: Because they provide a valuable service in helping us to answer questions like that.

Departmental Correspondence

14. **Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): What steps he has taken to encourage Departments to set improved response times for letters from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [80305]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The Government believe that all correspondence should be answered quickly and clearly. All Departments and agencies are required to set targets for responding to correspondence from Members of Parliament and the public, and to monitor and report on their performance. Later this month, I shall address a workshop for those concerned to discuss how we can further improve correspondence handling by central Government Departments.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman knows that every single Member of Parliament is aware that he or she is not receiving the service that they and their constituents require. Surely, it is not good enough to set targets of three, or even four, weeks for receiving a reply to a letter from a Member of Parliament, when there is a failure to meet those targets in 50 per cent. of cases. What is he really going to do about that situation? We have just heard about all those additional advisers; perhaps he should sack them and simply employ some good secretaries.

Mr. Kilfoyle: That is a bit rich coming from an ex-political adviser. Having said that—

Mr. Bruce: I have never been a political adviser.

Mr. Kilfoyle: If the hon. Gentleman was not a political adviser, I withdraw the remark.

As for the question about correspondence, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that needs vary considerably from Department to Department. It is grossly unfair to say that all Departments are awful. Some do not meet the standards that have been set, but others do so. The difference is that the Labour Government set out to change things to ensure that Members on both sides of the House receive the service that they deserve and expect.

Internet

16. **Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): What action he is taking to ensure that all Government Departments are fully utilising the internet. [80307]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): As we said in our White Paper "Modernising Government", we intend to use new technology to develop a civil service fit for the 21st century. That includes Departments using the internet to communicate by e-mail across Departments, and with the public and business; to provide electronically a whole range of Government information and services through Government websites and to carry out on-line transactions, such as completing interactive forms.

Mr. Evans: I know that the Minister is keen on new technology and that he is personally keen to get into the 21st century. Will he tell the House which is the most popular departmental website and how many hits a day it receives?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I shall have to come back to the hon. Gentleman with that detailed information. He will appreciate that we are keen to enter the 21st century with the appropriate technology. As I said earlier, we have taken the first two most important steps, which are to begin to construct a Government-wide strategy for dealing with new technology, and to appoint someone in each Department at board level to drive through the implementation.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [80322] **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 21 April.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. After completing my duties in the House, I shall leave for Washington. I have sent a message on behalf of Britain to the United States of America expressing our shock and sympathy in respect of the appalling tragedy of the murdered schoolchildren in Littleton, Colorado. I know that the whole House shares those sentiments.

Mr. Jack: I should like to associate myself with the Prime Minister's final words.

May I remind the Prime Minister that, in the House this time last week, there appeared to be great confusion on the Government Benches about what exactly a

withholding tax is? Last Friday, the Economic and Finance Council failed to come to an agreement on that matter. In the light of the damage that the imposition of that wholly unnecessary tax could do to the eurobond market in the City, will the Prime Minister give the House an unequivocal assurance that the Chancellor will not accept any proposal to impose the tax on the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said exactly that at the ECOFIN meeting. We shall not hesitate to use our veto, if that is necessary. The great difference between this Government and the one of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a member is that we manage to succeed in Europe.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): This Government's agreement to pay compensation to tens of thousands of miners and their families whose lives were ruined by crippling bronchitis and emphysema was both welcome and long overdue. However, will my right hon. Friend do all he can to speed up payments? The sad truth is that thousands of miners have lost their battle for life while being forced to wait 10 years to win their battle for justice.

The Prime Minister: I understand that we have already made some payments, but we are conscious of the fact that we need to speed up the payment system. We are giving urgent consideration to that matter and I hope that, within the next few weeks, we will be able to indicate exactly what we can do to ensure that the money gets to the people who have waited a very long time for it, in very difficult circumstances.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I entirely associate the Opposition with the message the Prime Minister has sent to the United States in respect of yesterday's appalling crime.

In the light of today's disturbing reports of ethnic cleansing inside Montenegro, and of attempts by Milosevic to gain control of the Montenegrin police, will the Prime Minister say what assurances NATO may have given to President Djukanovic and what action the allies might now take?

The Prime Minister: We have already indicated to Montenegro that we fully support its position and that we shall defend its position. It is correct that there are reports of ethnic cleansing in Montenegro, but the single best thing that we can do is to make sure that our action against Milosevic is successful, so that ethnic cleansing is stopped there and elsewhere.

Mr. Hague: There is widespread agreement throughout the House that, now that we have embarked on the action in Kosovo, it must succeed. Yesterday, on the question of the use of ground troops, the Foreign Secretary told the House:

"We have said from the start that we do not intend to fight our way into Kosovo. We cannot".—[*Official Report*, 20 April 1999; Vol. 329, c. 680.]

May I ask the Prime Minister whether newspaper reports this morning are to be taken as indicating a change in the Government's thinking on that matter?

The Prime Minister: As I said yesterday, the difficulties of a land force invasion of Kosovo against an undegraded Serb military machine are formidable, as they have been throughout. I have also said in the House before, and I repeat now, that Milosevic does not have a veto on NATO action. All options are always kept under review, and that is sensible for us to do. The right hon. Gentleman began his question by saying that, now we have embarked on the action, it has to succeed, and I agree that it has to succeed. I would also say that we were right to embark upon it, for, if we had not done so, ethnic cleansing would have continued, ethnic cleansing would have succeeded, and there would have been no chance whatever of reversing it. It is only through NATO action that we shall defeat the policy of ethnic cleansing.

Mr. Hague: I have one final point about Kosovo. There is no doubt that the action is taking longer than was hoped initially and that the humanitarian problems are on a much greater scale than was anticipated. With many refugees seemingly on their way out of Kosovo and no immediate prospect of any of them returning to their homes, is it not necessary to prepare to look after them for many months, including into the autumn? That means the proper provision of health care, sanitation, education for children and so on. Will the Prime Minister discuss that matter in his talks in the United States over the next few days?

The Prime Minister: Of course we will. As for the humanitarian action, I pay public tribute to the extraordinary work of the British troops. Their ability to cater for some 600,000 refugees in the past few days is nothing short of a miracle. We continue with the action that we have set out for the reasons that we have stated. I think everybody now knows—it is one of the reasons why we tried so hard to reach a political agreement—that the action that NATO has taken provides the only chance that those people will ever have of returning to their homes. In spite of what some people think about it, the Kosovar Albanians and the refugees—even those who have been involved in some of the most difficult NATO actions—have one united thought: unless NATO succeeds, there is no hope for them.

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Halesowen and Rowley Regis): Is my right hon. Friend aware that business people in my constituency and the Dudley and Sandwell chamber of commerce complain regularly about a shortage of skilled people, particularly engineers? Can my right hon. Friend assure me and firms in my constituency that the Government are not only aware of the problem but determined to do something about it?

The Prime Minister: Over the next few years, the number of apprenticeships will increase by 200,000 as a result of the Government's specific funding commitments. We have long passed the stage when we regarded apprenticeships as an old-fashioned idea. Modern manufacturing and service industries need highly skilled, highly trained people. That is why the Government are spending more money than ever before to ensure that people have the skills that they need in today's markets.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Prime Minister note that the Liberal Democrats wish to be associated with the message that he has sent to the American people about the terrible school tragedy in their country? On Kosovo, given that there is almost zero

chance of reaching a worthwhile agreement with President Milosevic, does the Prime Minister accept that ground troops may have to go in to secure peace in Kosovo when Serbian forces have been sufficiently weakened as a result of the air strikes?

The Prime Minister: I do not have anything to add to what I have already said about the difficulties that would face a land invasion force with an undegraded and undiminished Serbian military machine. I repeat what I said a couple of weeks ago in answer to a question from the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown): Milosevic cannot have a veto on NATO action.

Mr. Beith: Is the Prime Minister further aware that the leader of my party will carry the message that the right hon. Gentleman has given from the Dispatch Box about the determination of the refugees to see action continue so that they may eventually return to their homes in safety under international protection? In his discussions with the United States President, will the Prime Minister keep in mind the strong public support for the action taken so far and for the need to take further action to ensure that refugees are not left in their current position, leaving an unstable situation in neighbouring countries?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I believe that public opinion here and abroad is very clear on that point. People have seen what has happened to the refugees and they regard it as not just a tragedy, but an outrage. People realise that we have a strategic interest in ensuring stability in that region. However, there is also a clear humanitarian cause. As I said yesterday at NATO headquarters, that is a just cause that we will pursue until we have succeeded.

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the visit to Westminster this week of a delegation of Russian parliamentarians, which was part of a bilateral exchange visit organised by Baroness Smith and the Future of Europe Trust. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Russia has a key role to play in seeking a lasting settlement in the Balkans? What recent contacts has he had with the Russian Government about the military conflict and the refugee crisis in Kosovo?

The Prime Minister: I welcome very much the Future of Europe Trust meeting, and I was glad to hear of this week's visit by the six Russian parliamentary delegates. I agree that Russia has a significant part to play in bringing the dispute to an end. Indeed, this morning I gave an interview on Russian television in which I said precisely that. It is important that we continue to give a message to Russia that the conflict has nothing to do with NATO wishing to extend its sphere of influence; on the contrary, it is a campaign against ethnic cleansing and racial genocide, such as that for which the Russian people stood up and fought so bravely in the second world war.

We have close and continuing contacts with the Russian Government and, as I said a couple of days ago, we are working on a package of economic measures to put to the G8 summit which specifically relate to Russia.

Q2. [80323] **Mr. Edward Garnier** (Harborough): Why was it necessary for the Government to defame Mr. John Simpson last week?

The Prime Minister: We did not defame John Simpson last week. In my view of democracy, he is entirely able to present whatever reports he likes, and we are perfectly entitled to say that those reports are provided under the instruction and guidance of the Serbian authorities. That is the proper way to conduct democracy. John Simpson can say whatever he likes, and we are entitled to make whatever comments we like.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I fully support the attacks on military installations and other military provisions in Yugoslavia and realise that there will be unfortunate collateral damage, but do we not often get things the wrong way round? We seem to be attacking civilian targets and that is leading to only collateral damage for the military. Will action be taken to ensure that such activity does not take place in the future?

The Prime Minister: The allied effort makes every possible attempt to avoid any civilian damage. Indeed, the civilian convoy that was damaged was hit precisely because it was mistaken for one of the military convoys that have been moving around Kosovo. Milosevic mixes up civilian and military convoys, and people are being used as human shields. We do everything that we possibly can to avoid civilian damage.

I say to my hon. Friend that, in a conflict such as this, there will be damage to civilians. We regret that and take every step to avoid it, but let us never forget that the tragedy that happened to the people in the convoy occurred without NATO desiring it and was the result of an accident, while Milosevic is deliberately killing people and having his soldiers rape women and drive families out of their homes. Let us never forget also that he began the conflict and that we need no lessons from him in the humanitarian care of refugees.

Q3. [80324] **Mr. Robert Walter** (North Dorset): Meat is imported which is from animals fed on feedstuffs that are illegal in this country and kept in conditions that are illegal in this country, but no beef has yet been exported from this country. Does the Prime Minister recall that two months ago, when I asked him when the beef export ban was to be lifted, he told me that European Commission inspectors had been invited to examine our abattoirs? Panic ensued in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and at 5 o'clock the following day, the chief veterinary officer faxed an invitation to Brussels. Will the Prime Minister now tell the House on what date beef exports will resume? If he does not have a target date, will he tell us why not?

The Prime Minister: First, the hon. Gentleman's comments on the Ministry of Agriculture are complete nonsense. There have been discussions between the Minister of Agriculture and the European Commission for a long time. The main inspections have now taken place—other parts of the process have still to be undertaken—and as soon as we get clearance we shall be able to export beef. We shall be able to do that much sooner than would have been possible if the Government who brought us the bovine spongiform encephalopathy disaster were still in office. It is this Government who got the beef ban lifted. We will get exports sorted out as soon as we possibly can. As I say, it is we who have had to clear up the mess left us by the previous Conservative Government.

Q4. [80325] **Dr. Ian Gibson** (Norwich, North): Now that we have decided to produce 1,000 more medical

students, is not the time right to start thinking about training a new type of doctor? For example, in the interests of breaking down professional barriers in the health service and of producing patient-friendly individuals, could not people be taught in the same lecture rooms—occupational therapists, doctors, physiotherapists and nurses? Also, could we not start thinking about places such as Norwich, which has three schools—a research park, a university and a new hospital—which could teach such a course?

Is not my right hon. Friend heartened by how fast we can break down Conservative organisations, when the deputy Leader of the Opposition is talking about public investment in services? What will happen next? Will the Conservatives be using the national health service and asking for the closure of private hospitals?

The Prime Minister: Of course it did not take that long for the Conservative health spokesman, who advocated extending private health care to take over the national health service—that has lasted about three days, which, in my experience, is quite a long-standing policy commitment for the Conservatives.

As for Norwich, it has done some ground-breaking work. I agree that it is right to try to break down some of the barriers in nursing and in the medical profession more generally. Of course, with the £21 billion extra investment that the Government are putting into the health service, we are going to recruit an extra 7,000 doctors by 2002.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): At a time when more and more regulations and red tape are making life difficult for business in this country, why have the Government been ignoring their own better regulation task force?

The Prime Minister: It is this Government who set up the better regulation task force, and I can give the right hon. Gentleman some figures. In the first two years of this Government, we put through less regulation than the previous Conservative Government did in their last two years.

Mr. Hague: In that case, why is the Prime Minister ignoring his own task force? That was not a very straight answer, although I suppose that after last week's performance, we should be grateful that it was at least on the same subject. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] I do not know where the Deputy Prime Minister is; he is probably being briefed for Prime Minister's questions next Easter.

Is the Prime Minister aware that the leading business man who said:

"We were consulted on the Working Time laws, but our advice was ignored . . . It's all a bit of a dog's dinner",

is not only the chairman of his better regulation task force, but his own business guru, Lord Haskins? Will he now revisit these regulations and reverse the Government's policy?

The Prime Minister: It is precisely because we have appointed Lord Haskins as chairman of the better regulation task force that we are in a position to consider the views that he has put forward. As for deputy leaders, I would rather have my deputy leader than the right hon. Gentleman's.

Hon. Members: Where is he?

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) is over there—at least he knows what subject he is talking about at each time of the day.

Is not it the truth that, in addition to the dog's dinners already introduced, and on which he is ignoring his own better regulation task force, the Prime Minister is about to flood small businesses with more regulations, from compulsory union recognition to the new food tax which will hit every corner shop in the land, and hit it unfairly? Is it not time that he called a halt to the production line of red tape and cut red tape as he promised he would?

The Prime Minister: I noticed an interesting omission from that list of regulations—the minimum wage. Are the Conservatives now in favour of it? The right hon. Gentleman's question would have had a lot more point to it had he taken on board the comment that I made in my first answer to him. We have put through less regulation in our first two years than the previous Government did in their last two years—and after all, he was a member of the Government then.

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): May I join the rest of the House in sending my condolences to the people of Denver, Colorado, after the horrific incident that they suffered yesterday? Given that this country suffered a similar incident in Dunblane in Scotland not so long ago, will my right hon. Friend reiterate how important it was to ban handguns after that incident?

The Prime Minister: Because of Dunblane, the events of Littleton, Colorado are bound to evoke many special memories and emotions for people in this country. We were right to take the position that we took on handguns. The laws of the United States are a matter for that country. I strongly agree with the sentiments expressed by President Clinton last night, for it is important that we teach children properly about these matters in the classroom. I know that my hon. Friend and her constituents will look back on the tragedy of Dunblane, from which they are still recovering, and recognise how much better our future is as a result of the action that we have taken.

Q5. [80326] **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): Like many hon. Members, over the past two or three weeks I have met representatives of many of the transport and haulage companies in my constituency, which are deeply concerned about their future and their competitiveness. Can the Prime Minister tell the House why his Government introduced in the Budget a massive increase in diesel tax of 11.6 per cent? As a result of that, and to try to ensure competitiveness, will he take on board the Conservative proposal that a levy should be introduced on drivers coming from the continent who wish to use United Kingdom roads, as is the case for our drivers when they go to the continent? Failing that, will he consider an essential user rebate for our haulage companies?

The Prime Minister: First of all, let us get the facts right. I repeat that the fuel duty escalator was introduced

by the Government whom the hon. Gentleman supported, at least periodically. Secondly, the diesel price at the pump has gone up less under this Government—7p since we came to office—than it did in the last two years of his Government, when it went up by almost 10p. As for the Conservative idea that I believe goes under the name of vignette or Brit disc, which is the proposal to impose a levy on lorries, we shall examine it, as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made clear. Let me explain to the House the inhibition on that proposal. The previous Conservative Government agreed a European directive limiting the amount of any such levy, so their current proposal is against the European law to which they agreed.

Q6. [80327] **Mr. Llew Smith** (Blaenau Gwent): Would my right hon. Friend give a little advice to a company in my constituency, Tillery Valley Foods, which refuses to recognise the trade unions, even though the majority of the work force are already members of a trade union, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation? Will he explain to the House how we will ever introduce partnership into industry, for which he has been pressing, when one of the partners, the employers, ignore or treat with contempt the other partner in industry, the trade unions?

The Prime Minister: I shall not comment on the particular case in my hon. Friend's constituency. However, we have introduced legislation precisely to give people the basic right to be part of a trade union and, where a majority of the work force wants it, to have that union represent them. The legislation is fair and just, and gives effect not to the powers of trade unions, but to the rights and wishes of ordinary trade union members.

Q7. [80328] **Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): Will the Prime Minister condemn the visit to Serbia last weekend by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) in the company of Mr. Paul Routledge of *The Mirror*? Does he agree that any hon. Member making such a visit runs a real risk of becoming the toast of Belgrade?

The Prime Minister: I shall say exactly what I think: that is a matter for my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon)—*[Interruption.]* Well, just a moment or two ago, somebody was getting on to me about whether we were attacking John Simpson. People have different views on this conflict. One of the things that we are fighting for is the right for people to have different views, whether in Serbia or here. Obviously, I do not agree with what my hon. Friend has said or done, but she has the right to do it, and we should defend that right.

Ministerial Meetings

Q8. [80329] **Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde): When he last met President Clinton.

The Prime Minister: I last met the President in February, but, obviously, we have remained in very close contact, particularly over the past few weeks.

Dr. Godman: I take it that Northern Ireland was on the agenda. Does the Prime Minister agree with the remark of President Mary McAleese yesterday evening:

"What has proved most difficult to agree on is the emblematic issue of beginning disarmament"?

My right hon. Friend, the Taoiseach and, indeed, President Clinton himself have sought to lower the political temperature and sustain dialogue between the parties concerned, so that an accommodation can be reached which meets the interests of the people of north and south. May I suggest to my right hon. Friend that one way of lowering the political temperature would be to guarantee the impartiality and the integrity of the investigation into the despicable murder of Rosemary Nelson?

The Prime Minister: I entirely share my hon. Friend's sentiments about the murder of Rosemary Nelson. We have put in an independent police force from Kent precisely to carry out that investigation. I hope that people can see that we are making every effort possible to ensure that the people who carried out that barbaric act are brought to justice.

We will carry on working for the implementation of the Good Friday agreement in every way that we can. The declaration that we made at Hillsborough was a way—we thought—that could provide us with a route through this particular impasse, but we will carry on working as hard as we can to achieve that. That is because, first, the vast majority of people—the parties to the Good Friday agreement—want the agreement to work. The most frustrating thing about the whole issue is that they want it to work and are, in my view, all committed to making it work, but we are down to some very great difficulties in getting over the last remaining hurdles.

Secondly, the Good Friday agreement still remains the best chance that people have for a good future in Northern Ireland, because it resolves the constitutional issues and allows us to move to equality of treatment for everybody in Northern Ireland. That is surely what the whole House would want.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Given the uncertainty of the air operations, will the right hon. Gentleman consult our allies in Washington this weekend on the necessity of providing rapid reaction forces, airborne forces and commando forces not only on the carriers in the Adriatic but in other locations around Kosovo, so that President Milosevic may be in no doubt that NATO is absolutely, irrevocably determined to see this through?

The Prime Minister: We certainly are determined to see this through. I do not want to add anything to what I said on the issue of ground forces earlier in our Question Time exchanges. I know that the hon. Gentleman realises that, in any event, at this stage we would be fighting an air campaign. However, as was said by the US State Department a short time ago, and as I said yesterday, all options remain under review. The difficulties that we have set out in respect of ground forces remain, but as I said in answer to earlier questions and say again now, Milosevic does not have a veto on NATO action.

On the hon. Gentleman's particular points, we review all options, but there is a justifiable limit to the degree to which we should discuss wholly openly every single

different part of military tactics and strategy. I know that he will understand that, too. I assure him that our will and determination to see this through is absolute. I believe that demonstrating that will at the NATO summit this week is a big part of ensuring success.

Engagements

Q9. [80330] **Ms Tess Kingham** (Gloucester): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the people of the city of Gloucester and, in fact, all British people on their generosity in responding to the Kosovo refugee crisis? Does he recognise that many tens of thousands—perhaps even hundreds of thousands—of Kosovar Albanians are displaced in Kosovo, and, it is reported, are living in the mountains, some eating grass, without adequate shelter, health care or any facilities and in very dire need? What discussions has he had with NATO and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on considering the possibility of air drops to those very vulnerable people?

The Prime Minister: We have discussions the whole time about the feasibility of getting humanitarian aid through to those refugees, though the experience of using air drops is mixed. We have to make sure that any action we take in this respect will be effective.

The commitment and the generosity of the British people should not surprise us, but it is amazing how generous they have been. In communities and churches up and down the country, millions of pounds have been raised for the Kosovar refugees and we applaud that. The Government have added significant sums of money. However, the best thing for those displaced people in Kosovo is that we make sure that this action succeeds.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance. On Monday, the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon)—to whom I have written, informing her that I intended to raise this point—disclosed to the House during the debate that she had visited Serbia the previous weekend. She did not, however, disclose that *The Mirror* newspaper had paid for that visit. Will you advise the House whether, in those circumstances, a Member is required to disclose such facts and whether the hon. Lady should have made them clear on Monday?

Madam Speaker: It is incumbent on a Member to disclose such facts when making a speech, but we have had procedures in this House for some time whereby, if there is a misdemeanour of that nature, any hon. Member may refer the matter to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to do so, he is certainly at liberty to take that course of action.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I made it absolutely clear that *The Mirror* was paying part of my expenses for the visit, and the information is being sent to the Register of Members' Interests. I did not initiate the debate, so I did not think that that was necessary.

Madam Speaker: It is usual when taking part in a debate, if there has been some financial interest, for the Member to make that clear at the beginning; then we all know exactly where we stand. There is nothing wrong with that. An interest should be made clear at the beginning of a debate.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. As one who went to Baghdad in controversial circumstances in 1994, I remind the House that the then Foreign Secretary, Lord Hurd of Westwell, had the generosity to say, first, that he did not criticise me for going and, secondly, that other people should not criticise me for going. These are rather different times, perhaps; Lord Hurd might have been right.

Madam Speaker: I think the House will have heard the Prime Minister quite clearly say that he has no criticism of the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) or of any other Member of the House for taking whatever action they think is right. We are all free to take what action we think is right at the time.

Digital Television Broadcasting

3.33 pm

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for a universal service obligation for the delivery of certain digital television services and with respect to the delivery of regional television services; and for related purposes.

Access to television is much more important than might be suggested by television's entertainment content. Television is part of the fabric of today's society and a key provider of information, and access to information can be central to the quality of life. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. May we have a little order in the House so that the right hon. Gentleman—he is not yet right honourable, but he may be one day. May we have a little order, so that the hon. Gentleman may be heard?

Dr. Turner: Information provided by television can help people to find jobs, to participate in community life and to learn about life's opportunities. Access to television can play an important role in preventing social exclusion.

The Bill deals primarily with the important aspects of the provision of digital terrestrial television. In the analogue era of television broadcasting, the United Kingdom has achieved almost universal access to core BBC and ITV services. First, those services reach people—signals can be received by 99.4 per cent. of the population. Secondly, they are affordable. Television sets are relatively cheap: they cost from about £30 in second-hand markets in my constituency. Viewers can watch a rich variety of programmes. BBC programmes are paid for through a modest licence fee for the whole household, and ITV programmes, at no additional direct cost, are funded by the sale of advertisements.

Compared with digital television, analogue is inefficient in its use of the frequencies available. It runs at much higher transmission power levels, and requires many more transmitter masts and relays. A rapid move to digital terrestrial television to replace analogue is highly desirable. There are, however, real dangers to existing access if the move to digital is left to current legislation and market forces.

One threat to access will be the cost to broadcasters of transmitting to difficult locations. Without a policy for complete roll-out, market forces will not necessarily cater for groups living in sparse rural or remote areas. Another threat is the cost to the poor, particularly the pensioner poor, of upgrading their equipment. It is clear that the less well-off will be the hardest hit by analogue switch-off if their only choice is to buy new equipment.

Without change to current plans, millions of people will be unable to get the benefits of digital television. I want universal access to the programmes that people want to see. I want Parliament to protect the interests of those in rural or remote areas and those who are less well-off, so that the whole nation can benefit from what modern technology has brought us.

The Bill will impose a legal obligation on Government and broadcasters to deliver universal access to digital television. It will make analogue switch-off conditional

on a guarantee that those households still dependent on analogue television for core BBC and ITV services will be provided free of charge with the means of access to digital terrestrial broadcasts.

Analogue switch-off may occur on a national or regional basis. In either case, my Bill assumes that switch-off will be considered only when enough households have decided on the digital option either because they are replacing existing, ageing television sets or because they are attracted to the new facilities available with digital. A possible scenario could be to propose analogue switch-off for a time when 90 per cent. of households in a given area are already viewing digital television. In those circumstances, the Bill would require broadcasters to assist the remaining 10 per cent. to access digital. That assistance could involve the provision of decoders or a subsidy towards a replacement television.

Many of the details of the universal service obligation can be left to regulation. It is of immediate importance, however, to put in place now legislation that will ensure that the move to digital increases, not decreases, access.

The Bill will also deal with long-standing anomalies in the availability of regional variations of television programming. That issue is of particular concern to me and to 40 or 50 other hon. Members, because many of our constituents cannot receive the appropriate regional variations of BBC and ITV.

I have been fortunate enough to succeed in the ballot for an Adjournment debate on this issue next week. Today, I shall therefore merely give an example of the frustration caused to my constituents by this anomaly. Mr. Paul Cobb in Heacham, as part of a campaign initiated locally by Councillor Marcus Liddington, brought this incident to my attention. Last year, following a serious sexual assault on a woman in Heacham, Anglia Television filmed and broadcast a reconstruction. The film was probably seen by 750,000 viewers, but sadly not by those living in and around Heacham. Like many people in west Norfolk, Heacham residents can receive only Yorkshire Television. Norfolk viewers unable to see the reconstruction were therefore the very people most likely to have been potential witnesses. The introduction of digital television presents a golden opportunity for the rectification of such anomalies, and we should seize that opportunity.

The objective could be achieved through the use of the larger number of channels available to digital terrestrial broadcasting, enabling simulcasting to take place. That means a transmitter delivering more than one regional variation. Alternatively, the objective could be achieved through the exploitation of other technical merits of digital broadcasting, such as a different deployment of transmitters and power levels. My Bill will ensure that digital terrestrial broadcasting will provide viewers with appropriate regional variations of BBC and ITV television programmes. That obligation will also be linked to the timing of analogue switch-off.

Costs will of course be involved in the implementation of the Bill's objectives, but they should not and need not impose a burden on the taxpayer; nor should the public be forced to buy new televisions or decoder boxes. Fortunately, there is an alternative. Analogue switch-off will both remove the tight constraints on digital broadcasting that were introduced to prevent interference with analogue reception and free up precious frequency space. The result will be valuable commercial and public service opportunities, and a significant source of public revenue. Those involved in digital television may wish to buy frequency space, but there will be other bidders. The cost of providing universal access can be met by those who will benefit from early switch-off. The costs will be much lower than many currently imagine. On Monday, Chris Barrie of *The Guardian* reported that plans for boxes costing as little as £25 were well advanced.

Some time ago, in response to a complaint, a BBC spokesman remarked that a television licence

"is like a fishing licence: it allows people to receive television, but does not guarantee that they can do so".

A universal service obligation for television broadcasting would recognise that access to television services is a basic entitlement, and would make the delivery of core television services, national and regional, a legal requirement.

I believe that the industry will benefit from early clarification of its obligations—and, indeed, many members of it want that. I urge the House to support the Bill.

3.43 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) on securing time to present his Bill, but I oppose it, because I consider it to be a typical new Labour Bill. It is full of good intentions; indeed, it is positively cuddly and user-friendly. The trouble is that it will not work. As with so much Labour legislation, if this Bill is passed it will represent yet another Labour initiative that is under-resourced and not delivered.

Let me set the scene by describing the state of digital broadcasting in Britain, although the hon. Gentleman has already done so to an extent. The United Kingdom can be proud of the fact that Britain leads the world in both the delivery of digital programmes and the technology that is required for the process. That, moreover, has been achieved without the need for the Government to poke their meddling nose in.

Digital television can be delivered in three ways: by means of ordinary terrestrial broadcasting through a standard aerial, by means of satellite and by means of cable. There is a war going on at the moment: ITV will not let Sky broadcast ITV2 by satellite, so Sky will not allow its premium movie channels to be broadcast on terrestrial television. But that will shake itself out soon: it is in the industry's best financial interests for it to do so.

Satellite television covers most of the United Kingdom, provided that viewers can see the southern sky—otherwise, they will not be able to see Sky television! Therefore, if one lives in a flat, it may not be possible to receive satellite broadcasts. It is also difficult, without using up valuable spectrum, for satellites to be used in the transmission of regional programmes.

As the hon. Member for North–West Norfolk said, digital terrestrial television may broadcast regional programmes. However, most people do not have the necessary set-top box to receive those broadcasts, and there is not—yet—universal digital terrestrial coverage. However, the situation ain't all that bad. Right now, digital terrestrial television is being transmitted on 48 transmitters, providing coverage for 72 per cent. of the

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

population. By the end of this year, that 72 per cent. will have increased to 90 per cent. coverage. By February 2000, coverage of the United Kingdom population overall will be 93 per cent., compared with the current—as the hon. Gentleman said—99.4 per cent. analogue television coverage.

What does digital terrestrial television provide that is extra to normal services? As I said, ITV2 is available free to air. The BBC provides BBC Choice—which is a type of BBC3—BBC News 24 and BBC Text, which is far superior to the usual teletext. But there is more to come. On 1 June, BBC Knowledge will be launched. It will be Britain's first educational channel.

BBC Parliament currently provides non-stop coverage of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, but does so only in sound. That is not good news. Moreover, only the BBC could have a sound channel on a digital television system.

Madam Speaker, as you and the House will know, the BBC has been shocked that "Yesterday in Parliament" and "The Week in Westminster" have had a massive loss of listeners since they went on to long wave. Well—surprise, surprise—everyone in the industry, other than the BBC's administrators, knew that that would happen. Even the Culture, Media and Sport Committee said that the programmes would lose listeners, although, at the time, the BBC denied that it would happen. Moreover, moving "Yesterday in Parliament" has gained no new listeners for the "Today" programme. That result, too, was predicted.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): This is irrelevant to the Bill.

Mr. Fabricant: Sir Christopher Bland, chairman of the BBC, recognised that there was a problem. In a letter dated 16 April, he wrote about the loss of audience for "Yesterday in Parliament" and "The Week in Westminster". He said—it is relevant to digital terrestrial television, precisely the subject on which I am about to speak—that

> "Whatever the causes of that loss, there is an unacceptable 'democratic deficit'"—

as he put it—

> "which the BBC, with its special public service responsibilities, needs to address. The BBC must give appropriate prominence to coverage of parliamentary proceedings".

I should like to make two suggestions: first, restore "Yesterday in Parliament" and "The Week in Westminster" to FM; and, secondly—this is the point—get the BBC Parliament channel on digital terrestrial television up and running, now, in vision. Digital video compression techniques—which are ideal for coverage of Parliament, as there is not much movement in this place—would enable the channel to go live without any delay. So, Sir Christopher, the decision lies with you.

While I am addressing Sir Christopher through you, Madam Speaker, I should remind the BBC, which is bending over backwards to anticipate the Government's slightest whim, that it is the British Broadcasting Corporation, and not the English, Scottish, Welsh or Northern Ireland broadcasting corporation. We are still the United Kingdom, and the BBC should remember that when it issues ridiculous guidance notes to producers, saying that the words "British" or "national" are now not politically correct.

The Bill is a hotch-potch of good intentions, but is confounded by ignorance of the practicalities and costs of achieving its goals. In fact, it is a typical Labour Bill. Impractical laws are bad laws, and, like so much Labour legislation, the Bill proposes making bad and expensive law.

If the Bill is passed, it will be yet another bold initiative that will die a quiet death—just like Labour's promises on class sizes, on hospital waiting lists, on the new deal and on transport policy generally and the road haulage industry specifically.

For those reasons, I oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Dr. George Turner, Mr. Peter Atkinson, Mrs. Helen Brinton, Mr. Ben Chapman, Ms Julia Drown, Mr. Huw Edwards, Mr. Andrew Miller, Mr. Gordon Prentice, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. David Stewart, Mr. Gareth Thomas and Mr. Phil Willis.

Digital Television Broadcasting

Dr. George Turner accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for a universal service obligation for the delivery of certain digital television services and with respect to the delivery of regional television services; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 11 June, and to be printed [Bill 86].

Opposition Day

[9TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Road Haulage Industry

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.51 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the Government's utter failure to acknowledge the crisis in the UK road haulage industry; notes that, despite promising not to raise taxes, Labour have done so in their first three Budgets, so that the Government is raising over £9 billion more from British road users than under the Conservative Government's plans and that the UK now has the highest fuel duties and vehicle excise duties in Europe, which now far exceed any environmental justification; further notes that they have created a crippling costs disadvantage for UK hauliers against their EU competitors, are forcing the closure or bankruptcy of many UK hauliers and inflating the costs of industries that are dependent upon road haulage; deplores the way in which the Government has sought to misuse figures produced by KPMG that are of no relevance to the situation that faces UK road hauliers and notes that independent analysis forecasts that 53,000 jobs will be lost from the UK road haulage industry over the next three years if government policies remain unchanged; commends the Conservatives' BRIT disc proposal as a first step towards reducing the competitive disadvantage faced by UK road hauliers; and urges the Government to end its complacency and refusal to listen to the road haulage industry and to acknowledge that fuel duties and vehicle excise duties are too high as a result of its policies.

One of the great deceits that a Government can play is to pretend that they are helping an industry when, in fact, they are helping to destroy it. One of the hallmarks of this Government is that they present a smiling face at the front, while at the back the dagger is at work. That is the relationship between the Government and the haulage industry. The haulage industry has been made uncompetitive, not because of a mistake, an oversight or an accident, but through a deliberate succession of tax measures in the past three Budgets.

The industry has made its case patiently and in detail in plenty of time before each Budget and has always been ignored. I have five substantial haulage companies in my constituency. Selecting one almost at random, I should like to say that Massey Wilcox wrote to me well before the Budget, saying:

"Britain's haulage community already pays way over the odds for a litre of diesel compared with other European countries . . . For many of us, any further increase will be the last nail in the coffin . . . I hope you will appreciate the gravity of the situation and lend your support to our cause."

I have done that. I wrote to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor well before the Budget, but my arguments were ignored.

That may be slightly less surprising in view of another letter that was written to the Prime Minister by Reeve Transport Services, which is based in Sedgefield. Mr. G. Reeve, the proprietor, set out his concerns about the plight of the industry and asked that his Member of Parliament should at least understand the gravity of the situation. He then reported:

"I have just today received a post card from the Foreign Office Eastern Adriatic Department acknowledging my letter to you and to thank me for my interest about the situation in Kosovo!"

That graphically illustrates the interest that the Prime Minister has taken not just in his constituency, but in the haulage industry generally. Many other hon. Members will have received similar letters and will have been exasperated by the inaction of the Treasury and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

The first thing that the Chief Secretary should do in the debate is acknowledge the scale of the problem and the gravity of the situation facing that important industry. The problem affects not just the haulage industry as narrowly defined; agriculture, forestry, quarrying, the coal industry and the retail industry are all affected, indirectly or directly, by the Government's economic policies.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): The right hon. Gentleman began his speech by referring to the tax burden on industries, particularly the haulage industry. I note that he was a Treasury Minister when the fuel escalator was introduced. Will he explain to the House and perhaps to the people who wrote to him the thinking of the Government at the time and the purpose of that tax?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes. I shall refer directly to the fuel escalator later in my speech.

Let me note now, however, that the Government are imposing an additional £25 billion tax burden on the industries about which the hon. Lady purports to be concerned. If she is worried about the burden on industry—that was the implication of her remarks—what is she doing to get the measures in the Budget reversed?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall give way in due course, when I have made further progress with my speech and directly addressed the issue of the fuel escalator.

It is not just a matter of fuel; it is a double burden of high vehicle excise duty and high fuel duties, both of which are way above continental rates. In the Finance Bill that is now before the House, the Government are further increasing the vehicle excise duty on some heavy lorries to the staggering sum of £5,750 a year. That is several times the highest rate in any other European Union country.

The Government excuse their action by saying that they want to penalise lorries for using heavy axle weights and encourage hauliers to fit an extra sixth axle to their units. However, the provision will not have that effect. Had the Government listened to the industry or consulted before taking action, they would know that fitting an extra sixth axle is not just more expensive, but increases fuel consumption and the Government are increasing the cost of fuel. It is another example of a contradictory policy pulling in two directions at once. The Government are hitting the industry with higher road tax and higher fuel duties.

I now turn to the fuel escalator.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Perhaps the hon. Lady should first hear what I am about to say.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

The Government inherited a fuel escalator of 5 per cent. a year as Labour Back Benchers are now aware. They have now increased the escalator to 6 per cent. It is not a trivial amount. By the end of this Parliament, that increase will raise an extra £1 billion a year from diesel duty alone, which represents only a minority of hydrocarbon revenue. However, the Government also introduced an extra Budget, with more taxation. Not content with the 6 per cent. real-terms increase, they have targeted diesel and singled out industry for extra increases. This year, the price of diesel will rise by a staggering 12 per cent. in addition to the increases in the last two Budgets.

We believe that the time has come to stop the escalator. Any justification for it has now been removed.

Jacqui Smith: May I perhaps have an answer today to the question that I asked the right hon. Gentleman yesterday? On the basis that he is reiterating the policy of withdrawing the fuel escalator, how would the Opposition fund the £1.6 billion black hole that they would open up in the public finances?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I gave the hon. Lady an answer yesterday. I cannot give her the means to understand it, but I can repeat it. The Government's abject and continuing failure to reform the welfare state has created a gap between the plans that we left behind and the expenditure that they are now incurring. If the Government got back to our social security expenditure profile, an equivalent amount of revenue would be available.

Over this Parliament, the Government will be raising an extra £40 billion by way of taxation—and that is just from taxes announced in their first three Budgets. That is a colossal additional burden on British people and industry. We are proposing to give back one small part of that to the people who earned the money in the first place.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Is my right hon. Friend sure that the British people will actually pay those increases and carry that tax burden? Will he comment on the stories that I have heard that overnight ferries to the continent carry a substantial number of lorries at cheap rates which fill up with fuel on the continent, saving £380, and then return to this country? Does he have any evidence of that?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I do. My right hon. Friend will be familiar with the firm of Frampton's in Somerset. Mr. Frampton has written to the Prime Minister to point out that each of his lorries can save £592 every time it fills up in another continental country. That is the cost to the Exchequer; it also illustrates the colossal loss of competitiveness faced by British hauliers unless they can avail themselves of foreign filling stations.

It was never intended that the fuel escalator should continue indefinitely. Alcohol taxation is an example that I have given the House previously. The previous Government had a similar increase, year-on-year, but, faced with similar problems of cross-border shopping and smuggling, we froze alcohol duties in our last two Budgets and cut duty on spirits, particularly in light of representations made by the Scotch whisky industry.

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): How much does it cost a lorry to travel across the sea and back? How much does it cost ordinary people to do that? That answer should tell us that there are no savings whatever.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am afraid that the hon. Lady is entirely wrong. It costs a great deal less to send a tractor unit across to the continent on a ferry than the amount saved by filling up in a foreign port. If she believes that this is not a problem, why does she not support our demand for an independent and impartial study into the matter, to be published by the Government, to show all the comparative costs? That suggestion—as with all our suggestions and those from the haulage industry to try to get to the bottom of the matter—has been turned down by the Government. I can confirm that lorries and tractor units from my constituency are travelling to the continent to take advantage of the duty differential.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Is not the most disingenuous aspect of all this the Government's persistence in maintaining that a KPMG report somehow supports the notion that transport costs in this country are cheaper than elsewhere in Europe, when the report says no such thing? Is it not totally disingenuous of the Government to continue to rely on and abuse that report?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is entirely right. One of the most threadbare excuses used by the Government for continuing with their policy is the existence of this two-year-old report, which was commissioned by the Canadian Government and looked into general transport costs. It concluded that those costs were, to some extent, lower in this country simply because of what the report referred to as the "compact market area"—the fact that, in the UK, many factories are comparatively near their domestic customers. It passed no judgment on costs per tonne per mile, which is the subject at the bottom of this debate. If the Government cannot do better than to recycle an old study, that shows the weakness of their argument.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I have a copy of the KPMG report in my hand. Yesterday, I rang up Mr. Glenn Mair, the project manager in Vancouver. The report is a comparison of business costs in the G7 countries and Austria, and it does not include the Dutch and Belgian figures, which the Deputy Prime Minister cited last week. It is a comparison of business costs and, as Mr. Mair said to me yesterday, the road freight component is very limited. Only six pages out of 156 refer to transportation: it is not a detailed analysis of the UK trucking industry. KPMG in Canada actually asked KPMG in London to talk to the Minister of Transport on the day of the truckers' rally to warn him not to misinterpret the report.

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. There must be a response from the right hon. Member who is at the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) makes a very

serious point. It now seems that the Government are misinterpreting the report, even though they were warned about doing so by its authors.

Dr. Reid: The right hon. Gentleman is misleading the House.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am not misleading the House in any way: I am responding to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire. If he is right, it appears that the Government are guilty of misleading the House.

Dr. Reid: Not only did the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) mislead the House—no doubt accidentally—but the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) perpetuated that misleading of the House.

Not only did I speak to KPMG before I made those comments, but its representatives were with me at the press briefing and answered questions. In front of the press, I asked them whether what I had said was an accurate reflection of their report, and they answered, "Yes." I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw what he said and its implications. There was no misinterpretation. KPMG representatives were sitting within 5 yd of me when I briefed the press, and they were asked specifically if my version of the report was accurate. I hope that the hon. Member for North Shropshire will do the honourable thing and withdraw the insinuation that my briefing of the press was done without KPMG's knowledge, against its advice or contrary to its interpretation of the report.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If what the right hon. Gentleman says is correct, why has KPMG not made a public statement on the matter?

Mr. Paterson *rose—*

Mr. Heathcoat–Amory: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire to get to the bottom of the matter, but nothing alters the fact that the Government have used the report in a way that was not intended by the original authors. That is my clear understanding and it has not been contradicted by KPMG.

Mr. Paterson: I simply reported a telephone conversation that I had yesterday with the project manager in charge of preparing the report, which is a comparison of all business costs in G7 countries and Austria. I can find no mention of Belgium or the Netherlands, although the Deputy Prime Minister cited figures for those countries in Prime Minister's Question Time last week. Mr. Mair told me that the Dutch and Belgian figures could not possibly be from the KPMG report. Even the Deputy Prime Minister can recognise flags, and neither the Dutch nor the Belgian flag is on the front cover.

Dr. Reid: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you know, I enjoy the robust exchanges of the House.

Mr. Tom King: That is not a point of order.

Dr. Reid: It is a point of order and honour, if the right hon. Gentleman will allow me to make it. The clear imputation of the hon. Member for North Shropshire was that I had misled the House and the country by my references to KPMG. I have assured the House not only that I did not do so, but that the KPMG personnel present at the press briefing that I gave, when asked specifically whether my representation of the report was accurate, said that it was. Through you, Madam Speaker, I once again ask the hon. Member for North Shropshire, if he is an honourable gentleman, to withdraw the imputation that he has made.

Madam Speaker: This is barely a point of order for me. It is a matter of very ferocious argument, but hon. Members are responsible for the statements that they make in the House and the debate will have to continue on that basis. The statement that has been made will be challenged on the Floor of the House in the debate, and no doubt for some days to come.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire accurately described a telephone conversation that he had, and he has relayed the substance of that conversation for the benefit of the House. I find nothing improper in that. It remains the case that, if the only study that the Government can produce is one drawn up for the Canadian Government using data that are two years old, that shows how threadbare is this Government's case. Nothing has altered that.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the subjects of disingenuousness and of taxation by stealth, will he recall, for the benefit of the House, the letter that appeared in *The Times* of 15 March from Mr. David Green, the director-general of the Freight Transport Association? It was signed by many other business leaders, who complained that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had signally failed in his Budget speech even to refer to the massive increase in diesel fuel duties. Is that not entirely emblematic of the Government's approach to these important matters?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I agree: it is entirely in character for the Government and for the Chancellor to refuse to reveal, in a long Budget statement, many matters of substance, including these colossal tax-raising measures. They have rendered an entire British industry uncompetitive with Europe.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we have to be honourable if we are to proceed with the debate? The right hon. Gentleman was Paymaster General in the previous Government when the vehicle fuel escalator duty was introduced. Is the House not entitled to know the reasons for that introduction, and the direct relationship with carbon dioxide emissions?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Lady is going back a long way. I have dealt with the fuel escalator and given our reasons for ending it. The hon. Lady will have to accept that it is this Government who persist with an escalator that is long past its sell-by date. Indeed, they have increased it, despite representations from the haulage industry. The industry has a rock-solid case, but the Government have blocked their ears to it. That is a

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

standing indictment of the Government's attitude to business. The hon. Lady's question would be better directed to Ministers.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me, but I want to make some progress before I give way again.

We are entitled to ask who the beneficiaries of the policy are. We have heard already that the French Treasury is benefiting from British firms taking lorries to the continent to fill up with diesel. However, I regret to say that the paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland are the beneficiaries of the massive and continuing smuggling of duties from the Republic.

That problem was also pointed out to the Government in plenty of time for the Budget. The Petrol Retailers Association wrote to the Treasury last year, and stated:

"some 160,000 tonnes of fuel were being smuggled from south of the border with a loss to the Treasury in excess of £100 million. The price differential between Northern Ireland and the Republic has led to a huge trade in smuggling products. The effect on the retail petrol industry in the Province has been catastrophic."

In a reply from an official, all that the Government did was to state that, although £100 million is a great deal of money, it is not necessarily very large compared to the total yield of £20 billion from hydrocarbon oils. That is utterly complacent and irresponsible. It is reported that that smuggling operation is not being conducted by legitimate traders—almost by definition such an operation is illegal—and that at least some of the profit is finding its way into the hands of the paramilitaries.

When in opposition, the Prime Minister was fond of saying that he wanted to be tough on crime and on the causes of crime. Here we have a cause of crime: a large and growing differential between the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Union. We should be concerned not only by the loss of revenue, but by the continuing erosion of British jobs in a British industry that is caused by that differential.

What is strange is that the Government are committed to tax harmonisation in the European Union. The Paymaster General chairs a committee in Brussels that deals with what is described as "unfair tax competition". That amounts to raising United Kingdom taxes to EU levels, when those taxes are alleged to be unfair. Why are the Government doing that, when, in this country, they are creating unfair tax competition between our haulage industry and that on the continent? Will the Chief Secretary refer the whole issue to that committee, chaired by another Treasury Minister, to find out what can be done about the unfair tax competition being suffered by British hauliers?

We have another suggestion—that we should tackle the question of the vignette, or road charge, that British hauliers pay when they travel on German roads, in the Benelux countries or in some other countries of the EU. We propose that a similar or equivalent charge, called a Brit disc, be levied on British hauliers and foreign lorries visiting the UK, the revenue from which could be used to reduce vehicle excise duty. That would not solve the whole problem, and it would certainly not solve it quickly. However, the idea has received the support of the trade associations and individual hauliers; I ask the Government to take it seriously.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): My right hon. Friend clearly points out what happens in Europe. However, about an hour ago, during Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister said that European directives prevented us from adopting that system in this country. Why can other European countries get away with it, while, according to the Prime Minister, we cannot?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do not for one moment accept that it is impossible. There may be a limit on the amount of revenue that can be raised through a vignette system. However, that is a matter of detail; the fact remains that a substantial amount of revenue could be raised from hauliers visiting the UK—this year, about a million trucks will visit this country—who pay not a penny towards the maintenance or construction of British roads. The revenue from their visits could be recycled in order to reduce vehicle excise duty and erode the differential that disadvantages British hauliers.

When our suggestion was put to the Deputy Prime Minister at Prime Minister's questions last week, he turned it down flat. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) asked him:

"Will he introduce a Brit disc and a corresponding reduction in vehicle excise duty in the Finance Bill . . . ?"

The right hon. Gentleman answered:

"No, we will not do that."—[*Official Report*, 14 April 1999; Vol. 329, c. 222.]

It could well be that he thought that we were talking about the poll tax, but it hardly excuses his turning down, from the Dispatch Box, a constructive suggestion that has the support of the British haulage industry.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most peculiar aspects is that, although the Government claim to be concerned about jobs and small businesses, their rejection of the constructive proposals made by the Opposition and the haulage industry shows that, when it comes down to brass tacks, the Government do not care about either of those things? They are putting a vast number of small haulage businesses into bankruptcy, which will cost all the people who work for those businesses their job. Two companies in my own constituency have written to tell me that they are on the verge of bankruptcy as a direct result of the Government's policy. As for the escalator, the Government do not understand that, when they get to the top of an escalator, they are supposed to get off.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I agree with my hon. Friend.

What so annoys the haulage industry is that the entire issue is dressed up as an environmental issue—it is supposedly all about global warming. However, according to the Government's own booklet on climate change, if the escalator proceeds on its present course, the estimated annual carbon saving by 2010 will be between 2 million and 5 million tonnes. That same document enumerates far greater savings to be found in domestic fuel use, business fuel use and even Government fuel use for a fraction of the cost that the Government are loading on to the haulage

industry. In other words, we have here a giant misallocation of resources: for colossal additional expenditure by the haulage industry, a small reduction in carbon emissions is gained; whereas, if a tiny part of that expenditure were applied to domestic heating and controls, the reduction in carbon emissions would be far greater.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): If the right hon. Gentleman is proposing to forgo the saving of 2 million to 5 million tonnes of carbon that might be gained through the fuel duty escalator, which he says should be scrapped, what policies does he suggest would enable us to achieve the same saving, or does he not care about meeting our Kyoto commitments?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: One of the inconsistencies in the Government's position, and a reason why they are not taken seriously in respect of environmental matters, is that they are pulling in two directions by blocking gas-fired electricity generation and encouraging coal use, which puts more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The coal industry digs up carbon that has been underground for millions of years and sends it into the atmosphere; so the Government's energy policies pull in the wrong direction in terms of global warming.

Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford): Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that he would like to close coal-fired power stations, and so close down the coal industry?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No, I am not saying that. I am saying that we should return to the policy of the previous Government, whereby the electricity generating industry made its own contribution to the reduction in carbon emissions. The current Government have blocked that policy, yet they pretend to have a coherent strategy to tackle global warming. Worse still, they are laying the entire burden of that global warming strategy on the British haulage industry, so crushing it. That is the cause of our complaint and that of haulage industry.

We want the Minister to tell us that the Government recognise the seriousness of the problems facing the industry. Will the Government confirm the damage that they are causing in terms of criminality through smuggling, loss of revenue, loss of competitiveness and loss of jobs? Will the Government commission and undertake to publish an independent report into the cost of haulage per mile for each tonne of freight for the various competing means of freight transport? Most important, will the Government at last drop their complacent and self-satisfied attitude and start to give us answers, instead of excuses?

4.25 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alan Milburn): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"believes that everyone, including hauliers, must play their part in reducing emissions of carbon dioxide from transport, and that the road fuel duty escalator first introduced by the last Government acts as an incentive to greater fuel efficiency; deplores the hypocrisy of the Conservative Party for doing one thing in Government and another in Opposition: calls on it to explain which areas of public spending it would cut in order to pay for the abandonment of the fuel escalator; welcomes this Government's commitment to promoting a more dynamic business sector, in particular the measures taken to help the road haulage industry, including cuts in the corporation tax rates, freezing the rates of vehicle excise duty for most lorries for two years running, doubling the maximum reduction in vehicle excise duty for cleaner lorries, and reducing duty rates on ultra-low sulphur diesel relative to ordinary diesel; notes that the UK haulage industry benefits from the total tax burden on business in the UK being lower than that of other major EU member states, and lower than the average for the EU and the OECD; believes that the environmental measures this Government has introduced will play an important part in encouraging use of more fuel-efficient vehicles, cleaner fuels and greener modes of transport; and welcomes the dialogue that is now taking place between the industry and the Government in the Road Haulage Forum."

This is an important debate about an important and extremely successful United Kingdom industry. Despite a problem of overcapacity, the United Kingdom haulage industry is extremely competitive by international standards and the best UK haulage fleets are better than any others in the world. However, there is enormous variation in performance. On the industry's own figures, the best UK haulage companies are almost twice as fuel efficient as the worst companies. No one disagrees with the fact that there is considerable scope for many British hauliers to reduce their fuel consumption.

The need to become more fuel efficient has been heightened by growing public concerns about the costs—especially the environmental costs—that hauliers impose through the use of their lorries. Inefficiency of the sort that I have described leads to unnecessary pollution and extra congestion. That is particularly true because of the environmental problems associated with diesel usage.

It is right and proper that everyone, including hauliers, should play a part in reducing such emissions. It is equally right that the costs that lorries impose in wear and tear on our roads should be reflected at least partly in the costs that their operators bear, particularly when the newest class of lorry does damage to the roads equivalent to that caused by at least 10,000 cars.

For those reasons, successive Governments have increased the duty on conventional diesel by more than the rate of inflation. The fuel duty escalator was formally introduced by the then Conservative Government in 1993 in an effort to meet the commitments they rightly made at the Rio Earth summit. This Government are continuing the escalator because it will help us to meet the commitments that we made at Kyoto.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I should like to explore the right hon. Gentleman's argument that diesel prices should be increased. It is within his power and that of his Government to stop the French Government continuing a diesel duty rebate, which makes diesel even cheaper for French trucks, by vetoing the regulation that is currently before the Council of Ministers. Will the Chief Secretary undertake to do that, or will he allow diesel to be sold even more cheaply to French drivers so that they can continue to come to this country and take British jobs?

Mr. Milburn: It is odd to hear the hon. Gentleman, of all people, advocating tax harmonisation policies in Europe: I thought he was on the Euro-sceptical wing of the Conservative party. What the French Government decide to do is a matter for them. As far as Kyoto is concerned, I remind the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]*

[Mr. Milburn]

He should calm down. There will be many opportunities to get excited in this debate, as I am sure he will demonstrate in his winding-up speech. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are talking about legally binding international obligations that the previous Government entered into in all fairness, as have we. We must all play a part—hauliers included—in meeting those obligations.

I understand the concerns that the haulage industry has expressed about the implications of this approach. The Government openly acknowledge that a balance must be struck between environmental objectives and the needs of industry.

Kali Mountford: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way and for providing the answer that I failed to secure from the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), about Rio. Could my right hon. Friend expand on the notion of polluter pays? Outmoded haulage vehicles have an effect not only on our roads but on the health of the population, and particularly children, who breathe in diesel fumes.

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is correct. Until a month ago, polluter pays was a cross-party principle to which all parties subscribed. The then Conservative Government supported that principle when they announced their conclusions to the Rio summit, and we supported that policy in opposition. The Conservatives also supported the conclusions of the Kyoto summit that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister managed to negotiate. The polluter pays principle is right and fair. It makes not only for environmental sense but for economic efficiency.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Will the Chief Secretary explain the conundrum of how the polluter pays or the environment gains as a result of the Government's tax changes, which will have the effect of replacing British lorries belching British fumes on British roads with Belgian, French and German lorries belching their fumes on British roads? There will be no net gain whatsoever for the environment.

Mr. Milburn: I wish that the hon. Gentleman, who has expertise in this area, would consider the facts rather than relying on conjecture. *[Interruption.]* I say to hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench that it is conjecture. The facts are straightforward. It is a fact that fewer than 1 per cent. of journeys by lorries on our roads are undertaken by foreign firms.

Mr. Loughton *rose—*

Mr. Fabricant *rose—*

Mr. Paterson *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I shall allow the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) to intervene. He probably wants to apologise.

Mr. Paterson: No, I should like to try to educate Ministers about the environment. The Government's Kyoto target is to reduce carbon emissions by 12.5 per cent, using the 1990 rate as a base. According to the House of Commons Library, in 1990 this country produced about 159 million tonnes of carbon: power stations produced 54 million tonnes; other sources produced 76 million, and road transport produced 30 million. The Library estimates that 16 per cent. of road transport emissions were from freight traffic, so 5 million tonnes of carbon are emitted by the road haulage industry.

How on earth will the Government halve the emissions by the road haulage industry when if loads are not carried by British trucks, they will be carried by foreign trucks, and when Library figures show that road traffic is increasing year on year?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention was far too long.

Mr. Milburn: The simple answer to the hon. Gentleman's lengthy question is that we shall achieve our aim through improved fuel efficiency. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport and the haulage industry are working closely in partnership to tackle those issues. There are extremely simple measures that the industry wants to take, and can take, to improve its fuel efficiency, such as improved driver training, less empty running and better logistics management. Those are all straightforward options which my right hon. Friend is now exploring with the industry.

I say to the hon. Member for North Shropshire and the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) that we have established the road haulage forum to allow us to listen to the industry's concerns and, where possible, to meet its representatives. The first meeting of the forum took place earlier this month. It was constructive and the forum agreed to examine as quickly as possible the industry's competitive position, with a view to considering solutions.

Far from the Government ignoring hauliers' views, as the Opposition motion alleges, we are working closely with the industry and the trade unions that represent its workers. That is a sensible approach. Dialogue is certainly preferable to the disruption that a minority of militant hauliers have been visiting on the streets of our major cities in recent weeks. I hope that hon. Members of all parties will condemn such disruption as irresponsible and ultimately self-defeating.

Mr. Fabricant: Is not the Minister aware that while he continues to talk about this issue, businesses are going bankrupt? He says that the question of taking vehicles abroad is conjecture, but is he aware that Fareham council now plans to get all its heavy vehicles licensed in France?

Mr. Milburn: I shall turn in a moment to the allegations about flagging out made by the hon. Gentleman and by his party in the Opposition motion.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Milburn: In a moment. I shall make a little progress first.

I know that industry representatives have rightly been cautious about appearing to sanction any disruption by a minority of militant hauliers. They should be equally

cautious about relying for political support for their cause on the Opposition, whose motion I shall now deal with in detail.

The Conservatives have adopted the worst possible combination of hypocrisy and exaggeration in making their case. First, it is a bit much to hear the right hon. Member for Wells accuse the Government of damaging the haulage industry, because when he was a Treasury Minister, his Government's policy of boom and bust drove 5,000 road haulage companies out of business. I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that what industry dreads most is a return to the days of the late 1980s and early 1990s when interest rates and inflation were in double figures, thanks to his Government's policies.

In any case, the figure that the right hon. Gentleman quoted in respect of job losses, and which the Opposition motion repeats, is pure make-believe. Before the Budget, the Opposition were citing job losses of 26,000; now, that figure is 53,000. In all candour, I have to tell Opposition Members that thinking of a figure and then doubling it overnight is hardly the most credible way to win a political argument. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) wants to win a political argument, I am happy to give way to him.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is a clear difference between unemployment arising out of the accidental and unforeseen consequences of an interest rate policy that was backed by the then Opposition, and his own quite deliberate policy, given that he began by saying that there was overcapacity in the industry and went on to say that it was his intention to drive fuel-inefficient companies out of business?

Mr. Milburn: I am not sure whether that was an apology for the damage that the previous Government wreaked on the haulage industry, but it certainly should have been. In those days, the Government set interest rate policy directly, and they set interest rates in double figures. I remind the hon. Gentleman that interest rates were in double figures not for one but for four years.

What is ever more striking about the Opposition's position is their pure opportunism. This is from the party which, while in government, introduced the fuel escalator, extolled its virtues and defended its impact. We have of course become used to new U-turns and new posturing by the Opposition almost daily, but today the Opposition have displayed a degree of opportunism that frankly is enough even to make the Liberal party blush.

It is simply astonishing to hear the right hon. Member for Wells now oppose the fuel duty escalator as he was a Treasury Minister in the previous Government who introduced it in the first place. Not only that, but he was one of its foremost exponents. He told the House on 23 January 1995 during the passage of the Finance Bill:

"These increases"—

the 5 per cent. real increases—

"are also an important part of our strategy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The fuel duties policy should reduce carbon dioxide emissions by around 2.5 million tonnes of carbon by 2000. This, together with other measures already announced, should enable us to meet our targets of reductions arising from the Rio agreement."

On the same day, he went on to justify the escalator further. I do not know whether he can remember this speech, but he said:

"The fact is that 20 per cent. of carbon emissions in the United Kingdom come from road transport, and a large increase in emissions is forecast by the end of the century; so transport must contribute to any strategy to reduce carbon dioxide emissions."—[*Official Report*, 23 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 98-103.]

Nothing could be clearer.

I know that the Conservative party is desperately trying to reinvent itself, but I had not realised that that applied to individual members of the party as well as the organisation itself. What on earth are we going to see next? Heaven knows, we might even see the deputy leader of the Conservative party and the Front-Bench spokesperson on health agreeing their policies on privatisation, for example.

It is not as if the Conservatives stopped supporting the idea of environmental taxes the moment they left office. Quite the reverse is true. When this Government took office and announced that we were continuing the escalator policy introduced by the Tories, and, indeed, were raising it from 5 to 6 per cent. in our first Budget, the Leader of the Opposition told the House on 2 July 1997:

"We also welcome the Chancellor's continued use of tax for environmental purposes".—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 323.]

So what has changed?

Mr. Loughton: One thing that has certainly changed since 1993 is the abolition of cabotage rules in the European Union last year. That means that any continental vehicles can come to this country, belching out their fumes and taking UK loads. That certainly was not the case in 1993. I repeat the question that I asked earlier: how is that an environmental gain? It is simply substituting one country's pollution for that of another on our roads. The Minister must admit that.

Mr. Milburn: I cannot admit that, and there is no evidence for it. I shall deal with those matters in a moment.

Mr. Welsh: Although the Minister is right to attack the Conservatives, how can the Government justify the fact that Scotland, which is Europe's largest oil producer, has the highest fuel taxes and the highest fuel costs in Europe? Does the Minister realise that by raising fuel costs, he automatically lowers the living standard of every Scottish family and attacks the competitiveness of every Scottish business?

Mr. Milburn: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was a member of the party that wanted to increase taxes for the people of Scotland.

Mr. Welsh: How can the Minister justify the fact that Scotland is Europe's major oil producer, yet it now has the highest fuel taxes and costs in Europe? That should not be the case. The Scottish National party wants to make our industry more competitive. The Government's policy is attacking the competitiveness of our industry and the living standards of the Scottish people.

Mr. Milburn: That sounds to me like a further increase in income tax if, heaven help us, the Scottish people were landed with an SNP Government in their Parliament.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I return to the disingenuousness of the Conservative party. Does my

[Mr. Bill Rammell]

right hon. Friend recall, when that debate was going on, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), saying that signing up to the aims of the Rio summit and then denying the means to achieve them through the fuel escalator comes dangerously close to hypocrisy? Does that not belie the hot air coming from the Conservative party today?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend is right. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) posed a real dilemma to the Conservative party and the House. This is not straightforward. There are dilemmas and difficult issues to balance and get right, but it is important that hon. Members on both sides of the House veer away from a hypocritical position. I fear that some hon. Members are in danger of not doing that.

The Conservatives claim that the entire problem is down to the extra 1 per cent. that the Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that any hon. Member would be hypocritical in his or her behaviour.

Mr. Milburn: Of course not, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was merely repeating the words of the then Chancellor the Exchequer, who warned about the dangers of sailing close to hypocrisy on some of these matters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman may accuse a political party of being hypocritical, but certainly no hon. Member.

Mr. Milburn: That is absolutely right, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Conservatives claim that the entire problem is down to the extra 1 per cent. that the Government have added to the escalator. Talk about torturing the statistics until they confess. The truth is that the price of a litre of diesel has risen by 7p since the general election. Under the previous Government, it rose by 26p.

I remind the right hon. Member for Wells that three duty rises under the Conservatives added 10 per cent., 10 per cent. and 13 per cent. to the price of diesel. The party that introduced the escalator and is responsible for its having the greatest impact on fuel prices now opposes it. There is only one way of describing that: it is naked opportunism.

However, that is not all. The Tory party wants to have its cake and eat it. It professes to support a cleaner environment. As I understand it, the environment is one of the issues that today's Conservative party is most keen to discuss around its kitchen table. Indeed, to be fair to the Opposition, they supported the Government when we made our legally binding commitments at Kyoto, and I am grateful to them for that. Now their abandonment of the escalator leaves them professing support for our environmental objectives, but opposing the policies necessary to bring them about. Presumably, they believe that improvements in the environment will simply look after themselves.

I remind Conservative Members of what the previous Conservative Chancellor said to the House about the dilemma:

"Any critic of the Government's tax plans who claims also to support the international agreement to curb carbon dioxide emissions will be sailing dangerously near to hypocrisy."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 939.]

This Government believe that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was right—just as his party used to believe that it was right—to use the taxation system to achieve our environmental objectives. All that has changed is the Conservative party's attitude and its opportunism in latching on to an issue that it believes will bring it some desperately needed popularity.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, but this will be the last time.

Mrs. Laing: Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that he has entirely missed the point of what Conservative Members are saying? He is right, of course, in the statistics that he has just given on the rise in the price of fuel as a result of the escalator, but the point is that the escalator has reached a threshold at which it is no longer working. Since it is no longer working and of benefit to the environment, as it was when first introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), it should now be stopped.

Mr. Milburn: No, that is not the position. I shall come to the figures in a just moment or two.

The Conservative party's credibility will be damaged still further by the admission of the hon. Lady and, indeed, of the right hon. Member for Wells that its policy is now to abandon the escalator. If that is so, the right hon. Gentleman had better start explaining to the British people how the Tories will plug the £1.5 billion annual black hole that that will leave in their annual spending. Which taxes will have to rise to compensate for that loss of revenue? Which services will be cut?

Just last night, we heard the deputy leader of the Conservative party claim that it was the party that now supported public services and wanted to invest in them. Less than 24 hours later, his position has been totally undermined by his Treasury Front-Bench team, which would deny schools and hospitals the investment that they need.

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman; I have already done so. He is to make a speech, heaven help us, before too long, and will have plenty of opportunities to make his points then.

The Opposition's credibility is not enhanced either by the ludicrous claim that the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) and the right hon. Member for Wells are making about the impact of the fuel duty escalator on flagging out. I said that I would come to this point, and I now do so. The right hon. Gentleman makes much of the cost of diesel in the UK compared with the price in Europe. There is no denying that it is higher, although it

is interesting—some would say strange—to hear the Conservative party acting as an apparent advocate for tax harmonisation in Europe.

Mr. Paterson: We advocate lower taxation.

Mr. Milburn: That is not the position, as I understand it.

More importantly, the right hon. Member for Wells failed to mention the other costs that haulage companies face as part and parcel of doing business. The cost of fuel is of course important, but so are labour costs, other social costs and the taxes that companies face wherever they operate. Once all those factors are taken into account, it is clear that moving out of the UK would be an expensive business for haulage firms. That is so because the total tax burden on businesses in the UK is lower than that in other major European countries and, indeed, lower than the average in both the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Union.

For example, a typical firm with a fleet of 50 articulated lorries would face higher business costs of nearly £400,000 a year if it relocated from the UK to France, £600,000 if it relocated to Holland, and more than £800,000 if it relocated to Belgium.

Mr. Loughton: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Milburn: I have given way twice to the hon. Gentleman; he should not be greedy.

There are good reasons why Britain is the best and most cost-effective place for haulage companies to locate. With a handful of exceptions, there are no road tolls in the UK. In France, an operator can expect to pay road tolls of about £7,800 for every vehicle every year. On top of that, corporation tax is 50 per cent. higher in France, and labour taxes 100 per cent. higher.

Some overseas companies—

Mr. Loughton: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Milburn: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman any more.

Some overseas companies have already recognised those facts and have moved into the United Kingdom. Despite the irresponsible claims made by Conservative Members, Britain is the best place for hauliers, but the idea that Britain's roads are about to be overrun by what the hon. Member for North Shropshire last week called dirty foreign trucks would be laughable if it were not so serious: fewer than 1 per cent. of lorry journeys are undertaken by foreign-based companies.

Despite that, the Opposition advocate what they call a Brit disc—which, more properly, the industry calls a Euro vignette—as a means of taxing foreign lorries for operating on British roads and passing the benefits on to domestic hauliers either through reduced fuel prices or reduced vehicle excise duty. That, as I understand it, is the hon. Gentleman's policy.

However, even the initiator of that proposal—the Road Haulage Association—estimates that it could not raise much more than £10 million a year, which would achieve a maximum reduction in fuel prices of only 0.01 of a penny off a litre of diesel. In reality, the reduction would be much less than that because of the European directive, to which the Conservative party signed up when it was in government, that limits the scope of the Euro vignette.

The vignette would need to apply to United Kingdom and foreign hauliers alike, and administering and enforcing it could cost nearly as much as it would raise in revenue, so it is far from being a panacea. None the less, because the industry has made the proposal, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport has agreed that we will examine its feasibility. That is precisely what we are doing.

Mr. Jenkin: Hear, hear.

Mr. Milburn: That is not a surprise, although it may be to the hon. Gentleman. We made that announcement on 8 April.

The best prospects for the industry lie in the measures that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced in his recent Budget. The most fuel-efficient, road-friendly vehicles, and the companies that operate them, stand to gain from the package that he announced, which is designed to encourage the use of cleaner fuels and vehicles and to discourage unnecessary journeys.

We cut the duty on cleaner, ultra-low sulphur diesel relative to ordinary diesel. We made similar cuts in previous Budgets, and they have been extremely successful. By the end of the year, nearly all diesel sold is expected to be the cleaner type. The success of the policy will cost the Exchequer £400 million, which gives the lie to claims that our approach on fuel duties is driven by financial rather than environmental considerations.

We also cut road fuel gases by a quarter, further increasing the duty differential with conventional fuels. We froze vehicle excise duty for—

Mr. Loughton: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Milburn: I am not giving way any more.

We froze vehicle excise duty for 98 per cent. of lorries. We doubled the reduction in VED for lorries meeting low-emission standards. We cut the red tape surrounding switching lorry weights to qualify for lower VED, which is exactly what the industry had been calling for throughout two decades.

Mr. Jenkin: Not enough.

Mr. Milburn: If that is not enough, we cut corporation tax as well. The new rates of 30p, 20p and 10p are the lowest in the history of United Kingdom company taxes. They are the lowest of any major country and, indeed, the lowest of any major industrialised nation in the world. Haulage companies will be among the 270,000 firms in particular that will be benefit from the new 10p starting rate of corporation tax, which has been so warmly welcomed by the business community.

The Government fully recognise the contribution of the road haulage industry to the economy. The best way to help the industry is to ensure stable economic growth and long-term investment in business; the worst is to adopt the position of Her Majesty's Opposition. The Government will not be unpicking either the Budget or the

[Mr. Milburn]

Finance Bill. The policy of the Opposition is unprincipled, hypocritical and irresponsible. It speaks volumes about today's Conservative party and deserves to be rejected by the House. I urge my hon. Friends to do just that.

4.55 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): The Chief Secretary's special adviser has clearly drafted him a robust speech for this Opposition day debate, which he delivered with characteristic panache. It may well cheer Labour Back Benchers, but the House should consider what is happening in the real world out there. No one supports the disruption of our highways by road hauliers, but Ministers on the Treasury Bench and Government supporters should consider why hauliers are giving up a day's pay and a day's work to demonstrate. They are not doing so because of some fictional grievance.

The Government seem to think that this is a great fantasy, but out there in the real world, the road haulage industry is expressing its concerns and complaining. I cannot believe that representatives of the road haulage industry in their hundreds have been writing only to Conservative Members of Parliament to express their concerns about the predicament in which they find themselves. Perhaps they are writing to us because we are the only Members of Parliament prepared to listen to them.

The Minister of Transport tells the House that he has set up a road haulage forum, but his colleague the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has just told us that nothing in the Budget will be reconsidered—I think he used the word "unpicked". What on earth is the point of consultation with the road haulage forum if the Government are not prepared to change one iota of their policies? It is little wonder that road hauliers are not prepared to write or talk to Labour Members of Parliament, because they know that they will get no mileage out of them.

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether he is in favour of the action that road hauliers are taking to disrupt ordinary people's lives, or whether he is in favour of the Government's way of proceeding, which is to sit down with the industry and talk about a way forward to resolve this problem?

Mr. Baldry: I thought that I had made it clear to the House—if I did not, it was my fault—that I do not think anyone would support the disruption of highways and commerce by road hauliers blocking the streets. *Hansard* will show that I made that point clear.

Road hauliers would not give up a day's pay and take such action unless they felt that they had a real grievance. The hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton) and her colleagues should consider why they are demonstrating and behaving in that way. They are doing so because they consider that they are being driven out of business by the Government's policies. They are also concerned that the Government are unwilling to listen to them. The Government say that they have set up a road haulage forum, and that is fine. However, Ministers have said today that they will hold the forum, but that they are not going to change their policies. What on earth is the point of the road haulage industry talking to the Government if they are not prepared to change their policies?

Mr. Paterson: On the Government's willingness to listen to the industry, I had an Adjournment debate on this subject on 11 November 1998, and I asked the Economic Secretary whether she would allow me to take a delegation from the industry to meet her. The answer was no, although she graciously allowed me to go along for a half an hour on my own, and at a later date I was allowed to take one representative of the industry to meet some civil servants. It is only very recently, following the major demonstrations and the rally at the House of Commons, that the Government have listened and have set up the forum. They will still not allow into the forum delegates from trucking companies who want to attend.

Mr. Baldry: I do not know what the practice is at the moment, but when I was a Minister, there was an implied constitutional convention that Ministers would always see parliamentary colleagues, irrespective of party, if they wanted to take a delegation to meet them. In fairness, I must add that when the Chief Secretary was at the Department of Health, he always saw delegations. Nevertheless, until very recently, Ministers at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions seemed to be unwilling to listen to what the industry was saying. That must be why representatives of the industry apparently write only to Conservative Members of Parliament. If they were also writing to Labour MPs, no doubt some of those MPs would recognise that a problem exists.

Dr. Reid: As the hon. Gentleman has recently discovered the real world, let me share another bit of it with him.

Since becoming a Minister, I—in common with my officials—have been talking to both the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association. Only two months ago, we issued a major document on sustainable distribution. Both associations were present at the press conference and the issuing of the press release, and we were associated with their network. The road haulage forum includes the two associations, and I am in the process of writing to them to invite not only their full-time officials, but their elected presidents to attend. What we cannot do is promise to invite everyone who says that if we do not invite them they will blockade the streets of Britain. We are acting in a sensible, reasonable fashion: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured by that.

Mr. Baldry: The right hon. Gentleman says that he is talking to road hauliers. What he is not doing is listening. Ministers are clearly spending all their time talking at the industry, rather than listening to its concerns.

Last Tuesday, during transport questions, the Minister seemed to find it amazing that anyone should suggest that road haulage industry representatives should want to flag out from the United Kingdom to other countries. Only this month, the Road Haulage Association reportedly said:

"Hauliers are voting with their feet against the Government's swingeing increases in fuel and vehicle excise duty.

A staggering 2,000 firms—20 per cent. of the Association's membership—have asked for information packs on the 'registration plates of convenience' scheme under which they can register trucks abroad.

This is clear evidence, if it was needed, that the industry isn't just prepared to protest. It will hit the Government where it hurts most . . . in its pocket".

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baldry: Not now. I want to finish what I am saying.

It would be helpful if the Minister would do me the courtesy of listening, as I want to refer to an answer that he gave me at Question Time. When I suggested that, if everything was as hunky-dory as the Government were suggesting, it was extraordinary that so many firms should contemplate moving elsewhere in Europe, the Minister said that I had got it completely wrong, and that if I looked at the KPMG report, I would see that there was no problem. He said:

"The fact is that all the independent assessments, including the most recent one by KPMG, show that, next to Austria's, our road haulage industry is the most competitive in Europe." —[*Official Report*, 13 April 1999; Vol. 329, c. 9.]

The House could reasonably have inferred from that answer that the Government had commissioned independent research providing a comparison between road haulage costs in the United Kingdom and road haulage costs elsewhere in Europe, but, as we have now discovered, that is not the case.

Ms Ward: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baldry: When I have finished making this point, I will gladly give way.

When we look at the KPMG report, we discover that nothing of the kind happened. The report concerns a number of different sectors, and a comparatively small part is devoted to road haulage. It states that the only reason for low freight costs in the United Kingdom is "compact market areas", meaning shorter distances. It is nothing to do with the cost per mile of running a UK-registered truck on UK fuel in competition with other European Union hauliers on the same roads. Therefore—whatever the exchange, and whoever from KPMG appeared at the Minister's press conference—to rely on such a report to suggest that there is no problem is, at best, disingenuous.

Ms Ward: The hon. Gentleman said that some hauliers are requesting information on how to register their trucks abroad. However, he did not say that, when they receive that information, they realise that, when all the costs are taken into account, the United Kingdom is comparatively much more competitive than other European countries. Hauliers may be requesting that information, but, once they receive it, they realise how well they are doing.

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Lady and some of her colleagues have a hard learning curve to surmount—we have all been there. It is fine coming into the Chamber, picking up a Whips' brief from the Government Whips Office and reading it out, but, when road hauliers visit the hon. Lady's surgery and confront her with real facts, it will be very difficult to justify the pretence that there is no real problem and that it is all a figment of the hauliers' imagination.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe (Bradford, South): The hon. Gentleman mentions road hauliers coming to our surgeries. However, if they do, they will be talking not only about what the current Government have done, but about what happened to them in the 18 years of the previous Government. When they do speak to us, they will take into account all that has happened. If the hon. Gentleman genuinely means what he is saying, surely he will take some responsibility for what the previous Government did in 18 years to the industry.

Mr. Baldry: In the 18 years of the previous Conservative Government, I cannot recall any occasion on which the road haulage industry felt it necessary to take to the streets, to demonstrate, to blockade and to voice its concerns. I think that the industry always felt that, in the Conservative Government, it had a Government who listened and had its interests at heart.

I represent the heart of England—

Mr. Loughton: Metaphorically and physically.

Mr. Baldry: Yes, both.

Dun and Bradstreet's most recent profitability survey shows that Banbury has the highest proportion of profit-making businesses in Britain. I am glad to say that I represent one of the most successful areas of the United Kingdom. Why did Dun and Bradstreet reach that conclusion? It states:

"The M40 has helped to make north Oxfordshire one of the fastest growing economic areas in the South East".

and that Banbury

"has taken on a new lease of life since the arrival of the M40"

It continues:

"Banbury is strategically situated about one mile off the motorway almost half-way between London and Birmingham."

Hundreds and thousands of new jobs have come to north Oxfordshire because of motorway links. The goods and services manufactured and provided in north Oxfordshire are taken away and delivered mostly by road haulage. Therefore, Opposition Members' concerns about the road haulage industry's complaints are not simply about the road haulage industry, but about the overall competitiveness of United Kingdom industry. If the road haulage industry is facing substantially increased costs, it will pass those costs on to United Kingdom industry generally, and primarily to United Kingdom manufacturing industry—an economic sector about which I should have thought that the Government should be concerned.

Mr. Jenkin: My hon. Friend is making an extremely important point—that the debate goes much wider than only the road haulage sector. It is important to understand that only a certain part of the industry—businesses that already operate internationally—may flag out, and that much of the industry cannot do so. That part of the industry will have either to pass on its costs to its customers or to go out of business. Therefore, directly as a result of the Budget, the transport costs of businesses such as Cortaulds have risen by 11 per cent.—and the Government have the nerve to lecture us on competitiveness.

Mr. Baldry: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is no need to argue about the facts. Following last month's Budget, a litre of diesel costs 71.2p, compared with an

[Mr. Baldry]

average of 42p in the rest of Europe. In Germany, it costs just under 40p. More than 85 per cent. of the UK retail price is taken as tax. Under Labour, British lorries are subject to the highest vehicle excise duty in Europe. The Budget increased vehicle excise duty on 38-tonne trucks to £5,750 a year. The average in the rest of the European Union is £928, while in France, it is just £486.

The Government may be unwilling to listen to the truckers and the road haulage industry, but I hope that they will be prepared to listen to established organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, which collectively have advised the Government that 53,000 British jobs are at risk because of the high taxes facing the haulage industry. In my experience in government, organisations such as the CBI and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce did not give us fantasy figures or figures that they had not researched. When such organisations express real concerns, it is sensible for the Government to listen to them. British truckers face the highest road tax and the highest diesel prices in Europe. British truckers trying to compete abroad are hit by foreign road taxes, while continental truckers with lower rates of tax can drive free of charge on British roads, using cheap foreign fuel.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that when road haulage companies assess the competitive advantages of locating in this country or elsewhere, they will take into account the total comparative tax burden, which includes the lowest rates of corporation tax that this country has ever had and lower labour taxes? In comparison with the Netherlands, there is a £800,000 tax advantage to locating in this country. Will they not also take into account the costs of pollution, of which they create their share? Those costs are estimated at about £18 million a year. Will not the average haulage operator in this country take all those considerations into account—and to our benefit?

Mr. Baldry: If all those facts were correct, one would expect European truck companies to be flagging in to the United Kingdom and moving here. I suggest that the hon. Lady gets in touch with her local chamber of commerce to ask why the Association of British Chambers of Commerce is telling the Government that 53,000 jobs are at risk. The hon. Lady smiles, but I would not smile at the suggestion of 53,000 jobs being at risk. The figure has come not from some off-the-wall academic think tank or an industry pressure group, but from the CBI, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce and others, who have expressed their deep concerns to the Government.

Mr. Loughton: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is pretty rich for the Government, who have finally woken up to the additional costs of integration with Europe, to use that as their argument here? They have done a great deal to give up our opt-outs from the extra social chapter charges that the previous Government were able to avoid. They are seeking to bring those extra costs to this country.

Mr. Baldry: Since coming to office, the Government have taken many decisions that have made the position of UK industry far less competitive.

The UK road haulage industry is expressing real concerns about the position that it is being put in. They are not imaginary concerns. The Government have made it clear this afternoon that they are not prepared to take any action to help the British road haulage industry. The simple test of that is whether, in a month or two, the Chief Secretary or the Minister of Transport report to the House what positive actions they have taken or are taking as a consequence of their discussions with the road haulage forum. I am prepared to bet good money with anyone who wants to take a bet this afternoon that nothing will emerge from those discussions, because the Government are committed to the strategy that they have adopted in this year's Budget.

Mr. Milburn: Repeating allegations does not make them any more correct. This is the third or fourth time that the hon. Gentleman has repeated his allegation that we are not listening to the road hauliers. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport and my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary have had their first meeting with the road hauliers. I repeat the undertaking that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has already given to examine the industry's proposals for a Euro vignette. We go into that with our eyes open. It is not the panacea that Conservative Front-Bench Members think.

Mr. Baldry: When the Chief Secretary looks at *Hansard*, as I am sure that he will do shortly, he will see that in almost the last sentence of his speech, he said that the Government were not prepared to unpick the Budget or the Finance Bill. If he has not yet realised that the road haulage industry is complaining about the provisions in this year's Budget, he has clearly not been listening to the industry.

Ms Moran *rose—*

Mrs. Diana Organ (Forest of Dean) *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I shall not give way, because there are others who want to speak.

We are not putting forward the Brit disc as a panacea. As I am sure that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will explain in greater detail, the proposal is a first step to try to redress the situation. If the Government do not start listening to the UK road haulage industry—

Mrs. Organ: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baldry: No. I have made it clear that I shall not give way. I am sure that the hon. Lady is one of those who would like to have a chance to speak.

If the Government do not start listening to the UK road haulage industry, not only the road haulage industry, but the whole of UK industry will suffer. That will be highly detrimental to the competitiveness of the UK economy. I hope that the Government will start to listen, sooner rather than later, to what UK industry and business is telling them. Repeating the Treasury mantra will not make Government policies any more palatable or correct.

5.18 pm

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): I have listened with interest to the debate. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has adequately rebuffed all the

Opposition arguments, so I hope that I do not need to repeat many of the points. The Opposition seem to be having a problem taking in some of the realities of the outside world. It is interesting that there are not many Conservative Members in the Chamber this afternoon. I know that Lady Thatcher gave an important speech yesterday evening and it was a late night for many of them, but perhaps they should have the courtesy to come into the Chamber on an Opposition day.

Looking at the subject objectively, the Government have listened to the road haulage industry. Like most hon. Members, I have haulage companies in my constituency. It is important to take into account their costs and the opportunities that they have to trade across the country and across Europe. I am pleased to see the constructive way in which the Government have addressed the problem. Rather than hyping up the militancy and the protests that have disrupted the country—as the Conservatives have done—my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport has set up an industry forum to listen and consult with employees, union representatives and business leaders in the road haulage industry. The Government are trying to listen and to take on board some of their comments.

Mr. Swayne: I have been listening to the concerns of the road haulage industry. I also listened to the Chief Secretary. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the opening five minutes of the Chief Secretary's speech, when he told us, first, that there was overcapacity in the industry and, secondly, that it was fuel inefficient? The conclusion that we draw from that is that Government policy is designed to cause bankruptcy and fallout within the industry. One might even call it a price worth paying.

Mr. Leslie: It is funny that the hon. Gentleman should quote that. I recall that it was said by Lord Lamont, a former Conservative Chancellor, about unemployment. It is a shame that the Opposition stick by that comment.

In my view, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary got it absolutely right. Although the road haulage industry faces various difficulties, we have to consider the wider world and the environmental issues that we must address. The Opposition seem to ignore the fact that we face a worldwide environmental catastrophe, with global warming threatening the livelihoods of millions of people. We have only to see the appalling pictures from Bangladesh and elsewhere in the world, where weather conditions have worsened significantly—probably due in part to carbon dioxide and other emissions since the industrial revolution. It is incumbent on us, as the responsible party of government, to consider the issues and introduce policies that will go some way to honouring our share of the commitment to rectifying the environmental problems that we face.

It is important to point out that the fuel duty escalator, which was introduced by the Conservative Government, was designed in part to discourage the consumption of hydrocarbon oil fuels that produce carbon dioxide and other emissions.

The shadow Chief Secretary said that it did not matter that a saving of 2 million to 5 million tonnes of carbon would be lost as a result of his proposed policy of scrapping the fuel duty escalator. He described that significant reduction as irrelevant. We need to recognise the importance of meeting our commitments at Rio and Kyoto.

Mr. Loughton: Has the hon. Gentleman seen the report by the Automobile Association that calculates that the entire extra cost on the motorist imposed by the Budget was designed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by no more than 1 per cent., and that exactly the same reduction could be achieved at much less expense by issuing every person in the country two energy-efficient light bulbs?

Mr. Leslie: I have not seen that report so I will not comment on it. However, I read another report that said that continuing with the fuel duty escalator could produce a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from transport of between 5 and 12 per cent. by 2010. That is a significant figure, so it is worth keeping our eye on the ball.

When the Opposition were asked how they would substitute for the saving of 2 million to 5 million tonnes of carbon gained through the fuel duty escalator, they revealed their true colours. They wanted to cut back on the coal industry and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by returning to the policies that they pursued in government.

Millions of people were sickened by the previous Government's disregard for coal miners. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), who intervened earlier, will have many constituents who are worried by the threat that a Conservative Government will be re-elected and shift the burden from the road haulage industry back to the coal industry. That would certainly not be a solution.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Does my hon. Friend agree that there must be a dialogue on climate change so that the Government and industry work together to help improve the environment? That is why the forum is important; it provides the ability to set environmental targets and discuss their effect on industry. Is that not the proper way forward, instead of the militant action that the Opposition have supported?

Mr. Leslie: As usual, my hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. I hope that the industry forum will provide a way forward through partnership instead of the combative approach of the Opposition.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He spoke about the interests and views of constituents. Perhaps he can tell the House where in his election address he informed the good people of Shipley that he would be voting to increase taxes and regulation on Britain's road hauliers at a time when cabotage in the European Union means that low-tax, high-polluting foreign lorries can travel scot free on Britain's roads?

Mr. Leslie: I am not sure that it is scot free. As I understand it, the changes in the cabotage rules will account for only 0.04 per cent.—

Mr. Jenkin: That was in 1995.

Mr. Leslie: I am not sure whether it is any more significant in recent years. In any case, in my election manifesto I placed great emphasis on the environmental

[Mr. Leslie]

benefits that we wanted to achieve in office and the importance of being responsible in government and not simply making a promise one year and changing it the next, as the Conservatives did when they introduced the fuel escalator and then washed their hands of it. One can imagine what the country must think of the desperate state of the Conservative party today, scratching around for issues and spending two days of vital parliamentary time discussing this one. By and large, people understand and accept the need for the measures.

Ms Moran: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Opposition's view that we should return to their former policies is not only environmentally unsound, but is economic insanity as under the previous Government the country faced some £30 million net per annum in pollution and congestion costs?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend is correct. It is clear that the Conservatives never really intended to solve the problem of congestion or comprehensively deal with the transport crisis that was precipitated by their policies.

As I have mentioned road haulage firms in my constituency, perhaps I should say at this point that I have received more positive comments from road hauliers about the Bingley relief road which is going ahead thanks to my right hon. Friend the Minister. That policy will produce great benefit to industry in the Aire valley area. I may return to that point later. It is also worth mentioning that the Government are taking measures to encourage fuel-efficient and environmentally friendly trucks and lorries. For example, the vehicle excise duty concession has now doubled to £1,000. I hope that that measure, coupled with the increasing differential between the price of ordinary diesel and ultra-low-sulphur diesel, will help to clean up the environment and reduce carbon dioxide emissions, nitrogen dioxide emissions and particulates, which are seriously damaging the atmosphere and the health of all our constituents.

On competitiveness, I find it amazing that Conservative Members can single out one issue without looking at the context of the costs to the industry. We have heard about labour taxes in the rest of the EU, and that we have a relatively competitive position in this country. It is also worth emphasising the corporation tax reductions made by the Government, which will bring great benefit to road hauliers and many other businesses across the country. The hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) said that his constituency had the largest number of profitable firms in the country, and I imagine that they will be benefiting from the Government's corporation tax reductions.

It is worth repeating the point that road hauliers must pay tolls on the continent. There are few tolls in this country; the Isle of Skye and the Humber are two examples. In France, the owner of a typical truck will have to pay £7,800 in an average year. Those costs must be taken into account and, in my judgment, there is still a great deal of competitiveness for the road haulage industry in this country.

The Opposition have made great play of the fuel duty escalator, and, no doubt, they will want to come back to that matter during discussions on the Finance Bill. However, I cannot see the logic of their position. The fuel duty escalator has significant principles behind it that need reiterating. It not only has environmental benefits, but spells out clearly to the country the Government's plans over the longer period; rather than doing what the Conservatives would do, which would be to chop and change their tax plans in response to the political expedient of the day. At least this Government have continued what the previous Conservative Government were going to do, and have said that the escalator will continue.

Several references have been made during the debate to remarks by previous Chancellors. One that has not been mentioned so far is a comment by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) who, when he increased the rate of the escalator to 5 per cent., said in his Budget statement:

"It is not good policy in these environmentally conscious days to keep road fuel costs so much cheaper than they used to be."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 938.]

At the time, at least, he recognised the environmental benefits of tackling some of these serious issues.

Mr. Bercow: Does the hon. Gentleman not understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) made the decision to impose at 5 per cent. but opposes the increase to 6 per cent., and that there is no inconsistency? How does the hon. Gentleman explain the fact that the current Paymaster General, the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Dawn Primarolo), at that time opposed the introduction of the levy at 5 per cent., but vigorously supports the imposition of the levy at 6 per cent?

Mr. Leslie: If the hon. Gentleman cannot see an inconsistency between someone supporting the escalator at 5 per cent. but finding it appalling at 6 per cent., I am worried about his health.

Opposition Members must address some of the consequences of their actions. Although raising money is not an overriding objective, the fuel duty escalator brings significant resources into the Exchequer; resources that can be used for vital public services such as health, education and transport.

These are not small amounts of money: according to the Red Book, there will be £1.5 billion of revenue in 1999–2000; £2.9 billion in 2000–01; and £4.2 billion by 2001–02. The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) was asked how he would plug that gap, which taxes he would raise and which services he would cut—or whether he would add the amount to the national debt. He failed to answer the question.

Mr. Loughton: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it has been estimated that, already, £400 million has been lost in excise duties that are now going to the continent as a result of lorry drivers filling up their tanks there? That amount will increase enormously, and the money will be lost anyway.

Mr. Leslie: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets his figures from.

Mr. Loughton: From the lorry drivers.

Mr. Leslie: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman got that information while driving around in the cab of a lorry, but when he presents me with some objective analysis, I might take it seriously.

Perhaps I was misrepresenting the views of the right hon. Member for Wells when I said that he gave no suggestion of where the money would come from. I recall his saying during the debate that he wanted to cut welfare spending to achieve those amounts of money; that is, up to £4.2 billion in 2001-02. Cutting welfare is now the policy of the Conservative party. Pensions, child benefit and disability benefits are all to be slashed by the Conservatives because they want to reduce the fuel duty escalator.

I wonder whether the constituents of Conservative Members—especially their poorest constituents—are fully aware of the risk that would be posed to their financial well-being should the Conservatives ever be re-elected. What an unfortunate day that would be.

The hypocrisy of the Conservative party has been evident throughout the debate, and a strong whiff of feigned outrage and false indignation is emanating from the Opposition Benches. Opposition Members must reconsider their desperately opportunistic stance on so many of these issues, especially when they introduced the road fuel duty escalator in the first place.

As bedtime reading recently, I looked through some of the amendments tabled to the 1997 and 1998 Finance Bills by the Conservative party—as one does. It was rather soporific. In debates on the 1997 Finance Bill—after the general election—the Conservatives proposed a 7.2 per cent. increase in the duties on diesel and all hydrocarbon oil fuels. In 1998, they proposed a 6.4 per cent increase in those duties. That is interesting, given that the expressed policy of the Conservative party is to get rid of the road fuel duty escalator.

I should like to know—the House deserves an answer—whether the Conservative party will stick with the commitments it made during the last few Finance Bills. Will the Conservatives go back to the 5 per cent. escalator? Will they propose a 5 per cent. change, a 1 per cent. change, or do they propose to cut the duty?

Mr. Jenkin: We want to stop the escalator.

Mr. Leslie: I recognise that, but will the Conservatives commit themselves to freezing the duty on hydrocarbon oils, or do they propose to cut those duties? That is what we need to know. I look forward with relish to the amendments that the Conservatives table next week to the Finance Bill. They will be well worth waiting for.

It has been a pleasure to speak in this debate, although—as I said—I feel that there was little to add to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who showed up the hogwash and humbug uttered by Conservative Members.

5.39 pm

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate, and I am grateful that the Conservatives have chosen this subject.

There are genuine concerns in the road haulage industry about the present situation, which the Government have acknowledged this afternoon that they recognise. Hon. Members may disagree about the action that has been taken, but it does not help to name-call or to suggest that people are not interested in the industry when, clearly, they are.

The Conservatives have found an issue at last, after months of searching—taxation of the road haulage industry. However, they have not helped their case or the road hauliers by over-egging the pudding. The motion refers to the Government's

"utter failure to acknowledge the crisis in the UK road haulage industry."

It talks about 53,000 jobs being lost and says that the Government should

"end its complacency and refusal to listen to the road haulage industry".

Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members may feel that the Government should do more, but it does not help to exaggerate beyond belief the Government's response to the issue. Whether they are taking the right decisions is another matter, but they are listening to the road haulage industry. A forum has been established and, this afternoon, the Government have acknowledged some problems. I hope that we will now see some positive action from the Government. Let us have a sensible debate instead of the point scoring that we have heard so far.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Typically, the hon. Gentleman is being generous to the Government, but would it not have been more encouraging had the Government established the consultative process before the crisis? It is a little rich for the Government to say that they will discuss with the road haulage industry what should be done about fuel prices, because that is too late in the day and as a reaction to the understandable outrage that the industry has felt since the Budget.

Mr. Baker: The road haulage industry has been very articulate in making its case in the past few months and has caused all the political parties to consider the issue in more depth than had been the case previously. We should go forward from that point. As I have mentioned, the Conservative motion talks about the loss of 53,000 jobs. I see no evidence for that and I hope that when the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) winds up he will give us some evidence, because it is worrying for the industry and needs to be justified.

Mr. Jenkin: The Centre for Economic and Business Research conducted an investigation into the continuation of the Government's policies and it forecasts job losses of that magnitude from its economic modelling.

Dr. Reid: It is sponsored by the Road Haulage Association.

Mr. Jenkin: It is run by a former CBI economist. The Labour party is fond of listening to the CBI and it is a respectable forecast. The Government should commission an independent assessment of the competitive position of road haulage in the UK and then we could have a proper debate, but the Government will not do it.

Mr. Baker: I agree that we now need an independent assessment of the situation. We need it even more after this afternoon, because the opposing side have produced "facts" that are incompatible with each other and which do not stack up. We need to find out whether the road haulage industry in this country is competitive.

[Mr. Baker]

The Government have told us that the KPMG report and others demonstrate the industry's competitiveness, but the Conservatives claim that it is wholly uncompetitive or becoming so, because of the Government's measures. Those are conflicting positions and we need to discover the facts.

Mr. Jenkin: Can the hon. Gentleman not make up his own mind?

Mr. Baker: No, we need the facts. It appears that Conservative Members wish to make up their minds before they have the facts: we would rather wait for the facts.

Dr. Reid: What the hon. Gentleman and the Conservatives have asked for is precisely what we are doing in the haulage forum. Much hot air is produced on this subject, but we have agreed with the haulage forum that we will work jointly with the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association to discover the areas on which we can agree. If necessary, we will take independent advice so that we can build up a picture that will show whether the industry is—as we think—highly competitive internationally. That does not mean that there are not problems with sectors of the industry.

Mr. Baker: I am grateful for the assurance that there will be an independent element to the Government's talks with the road haulage industry.

Mr. Jenkin: The right hon. Gentleman did not say that.

Mr. Baker: Yes, he did. It is important that the facts are independently verified so that when we next have a debate on the issue we can proceed on the basis of facts that we can all agree on and dispute the interpretation of the facts, rather than the facts themselves.

I do not know whether there is a loss to the Exchequer, and if so how much, from hauliers going abroad to fill up. The Government say that that is not happening, and the Conservatives say that it is. I am not sure that it would make economic sense to go abroad, because one must also take account of the time involved and the fare on the ferry. However, in my constituency some drivers travel a long way to avoid paying a 20p car park ticket and waste far more in petrol. It is not necessarily a question of logic as to whether people go abroad. However, we need to find out whether that is happening and quantify the loss to the Exchequer if there is one.

It is clear from the debate so far that two black holes have opened up in the Conservatives' policy, and they need to be filled by the hon. Member for North Essex when he sums up. The first is the loss of income to the Treasury that will follow the abandonment of the escalator. If the Conservatives wish to pursue that policy, they must recognise that £1.5 billion a year, or more, would be lost to the Treasury. The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) admitted that it would come from welfare. Many people depend on welfare. They have no alternative income and would be very badly hit by cuts. To raise that possibility so cavalierly was not helpful, and it is important for the Conservatives to clarify exactly where in the welfare budget that cut will be made. Will it fall on pensions or the disablement allowance? It is not credible to have a policy that cuts something for somebody but does not say who will pay the price.

The second black hole that has opened up relates to Kyoto. The Government have made a full commitment to meeting the Kyoto targets, and our commitment to that is as firm if not firmer. I had thought, following the stalwart efforts of the previous Conservative Secretary of State for the Environment, that the Conservatives were also committed to Kyoto. However, if the fuel escalator is abandoned, as the Conservatives suggest, that will have an adverse impact on our ability to meet our Kyoto targets.

I have a copy of a press release from the previous Government dated 30 November 1993, following the November 1993 Budget. It states:

"The Chancellor also announced his decision to raise its commitment to real increases in the road fuel duties in future Budgets . . . to an average of at least 5 per cent."

That implies that 6 per cent. could fit that category. The press release continues:

"The Chancellor's decisions reflect a number of factors including the need to raise revenue"—

so it was a milch cow even in those days—

"and the need to encourage reductions in UK carbon dioxide emissions."

The need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions has not gone away; it is stronger than ever. Environmental analysis demonstrates that the need to take action on climate change is greater than it was six or seven years ago, but the Conservatives appear to be abandoning that policy. That is the second black hole that the Conservatives need to fill.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) earlier talked about two light bulbs. We should become more energy efficient, but the transport sector has increased carbon dioxide emissions when other sectors have seen their emissions fall. The transport sector is, therefore, a big problem in terms of carbon dioxide emissions.

It is also worth bearing in mind the fact that road freight traffic has increased by 67 per cent. since 1980. According to the Library's figures, it is set to double between 1996 and 2026. Whether or not hon. Members welcome that, it is premature to talk about 53,000 jobs being lost when such an increase is forecast. At the same time, rail freight has declined in gross tonnage by 32 per cent. since 1980. We must make efforts to ensure that the maximum amount of freight possible is transported by rail. The Government, to their credit, have introduced rail freight grants and taken other measures to achieve that. To the Conservatives' credit, the one part of rail privatisation that has been a success is the privatisation of rail freight, which has worked well with English, Welsh and Scottish Railways and other companies. Let us agree on that and build on attempts to put more freight on rail. That is not to say that all freight can go by rail as huge amounts of it must go by road. However, we must maximise use of the rail network.

Mr. Loughton: I am glad to hear the Liberals coming around to privatisation following the benefits that it has brought to rail services. Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that much freight on rail is carried by diesel-powered locomotives and that the increase in diesel charges will have an impact on the railways? Does he

agree that those locomotives are not subject to the same stringent environmental emission standards as lorries, and we need a massive clean-up exercise on the railways?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman was highly selective in what he said about our view on rail privatisation. I had picked out the one bit that had been a success.

Mr. Loughton: The hon. Gentleman is making progress.

Mr. Baker: Not much, though. The hon. Gentleman made the valid point that locomotives should be as clean as possible. It might be helpful if Railtrack used some of its gross profits—gross in both senses—to invest in railways instead of dressing up regular maintenance as investment. There should be more money for electrification to deal with that problem.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Any independent inquiry into the road haulage industry ought to consider the results of surveys under successive Governments that have indicated that, regardless of the substantial tax paid on them, the heaviest lorries in the UK do not meet their true track costs. Is it not time that there was—to use an overworked phrase—a level playing field for road and rail freight? The tilting of the field for several years has had its impact, and a declining amount of freight is carried by rail, with an equally adverse impact on traffic congestion, road deaths and the environment.

Mr. Baker: I agree entirely. There must be incentives to use rail and there must be no market distortions that discriminate against rail. The Government have begun to deal with the environmental impact of lorries, but we must ensure a greater correlation between environmental damage caused by lorries and charges imposed on road haulage companies. If the industry is working hard to clean up lorries—I think that it is doing so—we must ensure that it is rewarded, but we must discriminate against lorries that pollute.

Dr. Reid: We do.

Mr. Baker: I acknowledge that the Minister has begun that work, but it needs to go further.

We have some sympathy for the Conservative proposal for a Brit disc, because it relates to road usage. We are keener to tax road usage than simple ownership of vehicles. We must look at vehicle excise duties on our lorries, which are well in excess of duties in other European Union countries. That does not necessarily mean a big cut in revenues to the Exchequer, but we must examine the structure of the tax system to put more taxes on road use and fewer on vehicle ownership. Recently produced league tables show just how far out of line our VED is with duties in the EU.

We support the concept of what Conservatives call Brit discs, and we call Euro vignettes. I am pleased that the Government have announced that they will examine the idea. That is a sensible, non-confrontational approach.

I have mentioned Kyoto, but I have not yet dealt with the pollution factor, and it would be wrong to leave that out of a debate of this nature. One in seven of our children suffers from asthma, and up to 10,000 people a year die prematurely because of particulate pollution. Any transport policy must include strategies to deal with those problems, or we shall fail our children and those who suffer from pollution.

The Liberal Democrats support the fuel escalator in principle, but it must not be a milch cow from which there is no return for the industry. We must reinvest the money—hypothecated, perhaps—to ensure that benefits result from the burden of taxation on the industry. My colleagues and I have continually supported the escalator for cars, but we match that support with calls for a cut in VED. The Budget provided a cut for 1100 cc cars, but we want VED to be abolished for all cars under 1600 cc, which would provide a specific link between the fuel escalator and the benefits that arise for transport, both public and private. We voted against the Budget's proposals on the escalator, and we want the Government to make a more explicit link.

We would support increased taxation on motorists and hauliers for environmental reasons. However, there would have to be a quid pro quo, and people would have to be able to see where their money was going rather than watching it disappear into the black hole of the Treasury. Taxation should be shifted from ownership to usage. We have considerable sympathy with the idea of a vignette system, under which hauliers pay according to their use of the road network, but there must be commensurate cuts in VED if that idea is to bring any benefit.

Such measures would help to level the playing field across Europe. The Liberal Democrats have long supported an EU-wide carbon tax to eliminate the kind of inconsistencies to which various hon. Members have drawn attention. The Government have made some promises today and they are listening to the road haulage industry, with which I hope they will continue to work. I hope, too, that the Government will take independent advice on the best way forward for both the industry and the environment.

5.57 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): This is an important and extraordinarily complex debate. Following the huff and puff and loud talk that we heard from the Conservatives an hour or so ago, the House has settled down to examine real issues underlying the creation of an integrated transport system.

I thank the Government for the green measures introduced in the Budget, for which we have waited enormously long. No one pretends that these hugely complex issues are easy to deal with. How are we to meet our Kyoto commitments? How should we start to think about the environment? How should polluters pay?

No one wants people to be forced out of business, and the only way forward is consensus. For the whole United Kingdom, in constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) and those of the other hon. Members who have spoken, we must bring together fiscal, environmental and transport measures in ways that will meet our international commitments while also taking into account issues such as competitiveness. The same is true of my own constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson); we regularly meet the North Staffordshire chamber of trade. The costs to industry of road traffic congestion are immense. None of the issues

[Ms Joan Walley]

that I have mentioned is separate from the matter raised for debate by the Opposition. We must tackle the whole of this complex matter.

I am glad to see my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport in his place because he has made huge progress. I have every confidence, following the 8 April discussions, that further meetings will involve freight and haulage operators, the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry. If we failed to find a way forward, we would send out a message that the Government did not care, but the opposite is true. The Government are determined to deal with the legacy left by the previous Government's failure to produce a policy for integrated transport.

Mr. Swayne: Does not the hon. Lady foresee that there will be a reduction in the number of freight miles as a result of the tax increases? Is not the logical conclusion of any such assumption that a number of haulage firms must inevitably go out of business?

Ms Walley: We live in a time of change, when we must consider our global, international commitments and the basis on which our industry operates. We must understand that it is no longer an option to do nothing about congestion and the environmental problems that we face. Inevitably, at any time of transition, there is also pain. We are all responsible people—at least those of us sitting on the Labour Benches are responsible; and I suspect that many of those sitting on the Opposition Benches also want to be responsible. We must find a way of pinpointing the problems at this time of transition, so that we can deal with them properly through the framework provided by what is being done by the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry, and by the policies of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. When we have identified the problems, we can do something about them in partnership.

That is why I feel that today's Opposition debate is not the action of a responsible party and a responsible Opposition. The debate was opened by the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), a former Treasury Minister, who was responsible for the escalator that is causing so much pain, without any thought of how it would all turn out. Similarly, the former Minister of Transport, who was perhaps responsible for failing to persuade the previous Conservative Government of the importance of introducing proposals for integrated transport, is now the director-general of one of the haulage organisations associated with the direct action. That makes me wonder whether Members of Parliament want to exert pressure so that something is done, or do we merely want to produce a lot of hot air and dissent? Do we not want to be part of the solution? I want to be part of the solution; I want to work with those people in my constituency who ask for debates on this issue, so that we can find a way forward. That is crucial.

I followed carefully the progress of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport when he was the Minister for the Armed Forces. I have a special knowledge of his work because I was privileged to have an attachment with the Royal Air Force, and am aware of the tremendous regard in which he was held by members of the armed forces. If he gives anything like the commitment to his current position that he gave to his previous position, we shall have the basis for progress. When I speak to those in my constituency who are anxious about this matter, I want to ensure that they and I can present their concerns directly to the industry forum for road haulage that has been established.

The hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), who is no longer in the Chamber, talked about his constituency in the heart of England, where he said that he had the highest proportion of profit-making industries. In my constituency, I represent one of the highest proportions of manufacturing industries. We have a great dependence on freight transport to send our goods to national and international markets, so it is not in our interest to have congestion or environmental problems. For all those reasons, we must find solutions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) referred to the environmental health costs; the problems associated with increased asthma and the costs of ill health to the national health service. We must reduce emissions; that is why green taxes are important. *[Interruption.]* I apologise for coughing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think I must take a break to let my voice recover. *[Interruption.]*

I am grateful for that break, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps I should speak more softly.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister is considering the future of 44-tonne vehicles in the context of the wider debate that is properly being conducted on that subject. It is right that there should be tax concessions in the Budget for the more environmentally friendly 41-tonne, six-axle lorries. It is crucial that we find ways of giving incentives for more efficient vehicles that do less damage to the environment.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Walley: I will gladly give way.

Mr. Jenkin: It will give the hon. Lady a breathing space. We entirely agree with her on that point. The problem is that, after the massive increase in the vehicle excise duty for 40-tonne vehicles, the incentive offered by the Government for the 41-tonne, six-axle lorries is not sufficient. I have a fax from a Manchester Renault dealer in which he sets out the figures for his customers. He states:

"The figures clearly show 'stalemate', they do not take into account the interest loss on the road fund licence difference . . . but only 0.5 mpg down . . . The only certainty is that in future years fuel costs will continue to rise."

Because six-axle trucks burn more fuel, he concludes that it is not worth buying a six-axle truck. The incentive is not enough. If the hon. Lady supports that policy, I urge her to make representations to her right hon. and hon. Friends in the Treasury to ensure that the differential is widened to create a sufficient incentive.

Ms Walley: I am grateful for that intervention. However, we are not talking about doing something overnight; we are talking about the long term—a five-year and a 10-year programme. We want to ensure that industry can compete in the long term. However, I will gladly recommend to my right hon. Friend the Minister that the matter should be considered in detail in the round table discussions with the various haulage operators.

However, I want to point out that this is a matter of swings and roundabouts. Previous speakers have vividly pointed out that, although the duty in this country might be higher, other costs are higher in other European countries—for example, labour costs and tolls. All that must be put in the picture. I feel strongly that singling out one particular issue, without considering the whole matter, is the wrong way forward; it is not responsible. It is important that we do not do that.

I have read, with great interest, that people in haulage companies such as Excel Logistics—based in my constituency—believe that techniques and technologies can be further refined to take account of the higher duties. We need to talk to those freight operators and, in partnership, discover what the issues are, so that we obtain the greatest efficiency from every litre of fuel used by haulage and the freight industry.

I want briefly to refer to the Budget measures, which are welcome. Hauliers will benefit from a range of measures: the reduction of the main rate of corporation tax to 30 per cent.; the cut in tax rates for small companies to 20 per cent; and a 10 per cent. rate for companies with profits of less than £10,000. In the long term, those measures will help us to deal with the problem, not by considering only one issue, but considering it as a whole.

The issue is not merely about competitiveness. It is no good for haulage and freight companies to be in business if congestion is so heavy that they cannot get the goods to market, so I want briefly to refer to transport policy. We have heard much about the loss of income to the Treasury if the Opposition motion were to be successful—of course, it will not be.

Mr. Loughton: How does the hon. Lady know?

Ms Walley: I do know—merely from counting the number of Members on the Opposition Benches. That is a good indicator.

Let us not forget the legacy inherited by the new Labour Government—a legacy of under-investment in transport. I welcome the three-year comprehensive spending review proposals whereby £700 million has already been allocated to local transport plans and local road maintenance. I know how many times my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, other hon. Members from north Staffordshire and I attended meetings with Conservative Ministers, but got nowhere. I know how much better is the settlement for local transport plans and road maintenance that was announced under the comprehensive spending review. I am also conscious that we have received an extra £300 million for trunk road maintenance, which is an important issue to hauliers and freight operators. An additional £300 million has been allocated to railways, as well as extra money for freight grants. My constituency contains a substantial rail freight depot whose potential should be maximised. I want other improvements to be made: for example, I want Railtrack to give further consideration to opening up the now abandoned line from Cauldon Lowe, through Endon, to Stoke-on-Trent and so reduce traffic.

All the measures being taken as a result of the Government's integrated transport policies will make an important difference. I do not want to stand here and simply congratulate the Government without adding that, however far we go, we can always go further; we can never do enough, because more is always needed. In addition to the local transport plans, the welcome document "Breaking the Log Jam" and the work that has been done in respect of buses, freight transport and shipping, I should like to add an item to the shopping list: road traffic reduction. Yes, we have made progress on local and national road traffic reduction, but I want to take this opportunity to tell my right hon. Friend the Minister that I want further progress to be made. I want him to agree clear targets in partnership with everyone involved so that we can make progress on national road traffic reduction.

Mr. Baker: Does the hon. Lady agree that it would be helpful if the Government committed themselves to an absolute reduction in road traffic, rather than fudging the issue between having some reduction in road traffic and having a reduction in road traffic growth? We need an absolute target and a date by which the reduction should have taken place, and it would be helpful if the Government clarified their position on that issue.

Ms Walley: If there is one person who can never be accused of fudging anything, it is my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport. There is a great deal of support for national road traffic reduction targets; however, with those, as with issues affecting road haulage, it is important that Ministers sit down with all those who have a stake in the issue and all those who are concerned about it and find a way of moving forward that commands everyone's support. There is no way that we can impose targets without having in place the mechanisms needed to meet them. If the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) is asking me whether I intend to press for that to happen, the answer is yes, I always have done and I shall continue to do so.

The issues affecting the road haulage industry are important, but the Opposition have played no part in helping to resolve those issues through the manner and hypocrisy that they have displayed during the debate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should not suggest that any hon. Member is involved in hypocrisy—a political party, perhaps, but not an individual Member.

Ms Walley: I shall find a thesaurus and look for a more appropriate word, but I think that my point is well made.

The issues are important and we do not underestimate them in any way, but, during the next six months, 12 months, five years and 10 years, what is important is that the Government as a whole—the Department of Trade and Industry, the Treasury and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions—sit down with stakeholders and find a way forward that is in the interests of competitiveness, environmental commitments and environmental health in the constituencies that we represent.

6.15 pm

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley). I congratulate her on recovering her voice, even though I do not entirely agree with some of her comments.

[Mr. Owen Paterson]

I have been involved in the issue of road haulage since last July, when I was invited by the local chairman of the Road Haulage Association to visit his business. I went along and took my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) with me, as, by that time, I had received several strong letters from RHA members in my constituency about the pernicious effect of the dramatic rise in the fuel duty escalator and vehicle excise duty which were introduced in the first Labour Budget.

Distribution and transport are a key industry in a rural constituency such as mine, where 95 to 97 per cent. of goods are moved by road. All my letters to Ministers at that time to which I refer received no answer of any consequence—only standard replies. In November last year, I introduced an Adjournment debate on the subject, over which you kindly presided, Mr. Deputy Speaker; again, I was given the brush-off. Most of the Economic Secretary's response to that debate was a repetition of the second page of the numerous letters that I had received in response to my letters on behalf of my constituents.

During that debate, I asked whether I could take a delegation from the industry to meet the Economic Secretary, but that request was refused, although she kindly granted me half an hour, as I mentioned earlier. Only later, after real pressure had been applied, was I allowed to take along the director-general of the RHA to meet some civil servants, who apparently had either not received any of the letters that had been sent to the Department or not understood properly many of the representations that had been made. Only after constant pressure, more letters and a major lobby of Parliament did the Government finally begin to listen.

It is a pity that the Minister of Transport has left the Chamber, because I emphasise that, at every stage when speaking at rallies and conferences attended by truckers, I have insisted that they should not disrupt the flow of traffic and annoy the public. I argued that alienating the public just as the truckers were beginning to win the argument would be a mistake.

It was with great interest that we in the campaign began to hear rumours of the KPMG report. It was mentioned by the Deputy Prime Minister, who quoted it as stating:

"KPMG has examined haulage companies and has made it clear that . . . business costs are £600,000 higher in the Netherlands and £820,000 higher in Belgium."—[*Official Report*, 14 April 1999; Vol. 329, c. 222.]

I ask the Minister to ensure that the KPMG figures are put in the Library, because the report contains no reference to Holland or Belgium. I read the report for the first time yesterday; I was surprised, because the Government have hung so much on it, to find that it was not about the road haulage industry at all.

The report's title is "The Competitive Alternatives: A comparison of business costs in North America, Europe and Japan". The three main sponsors are the Royal Bank of Canada, Ontario Power Generation and Canada Bell. The preface clearly states:

"KPMG has conducted a comparison of the costs of doing business in eight countries in North America, Europe, and Japan."

Among the other sponsors are 26 Canadian organisations, the Austrian Business Agency in Vienna and the Telford development agency in the United Kingdom. The UK cities mentioned are Telford, Cardiff and Manchester. Only six pages mention transportation.

The phrase on which the Government have hung everything is found on page 6, which states:

"Transportation costs. Road freight costs are lowest for Austria and the UK".

However, that is qualified on page 27, which clearly states:

"Due to their compact market areas, Austria and the UK offer the lowest road freight costs".

It is interesting to note how close USA costs are to those levels, because of the low cost of diesel in the USA, especially when one considers the huge distances travelled in that country. Page 74 carries the warning:

"Caution must be used in interpreting overall transportation costs, since the modal splits and relative costs of transportation vary significantly among industries, and the specific distribution patterns developed for each industry also affect total costs."

The last page of the report contains a list of companies consulted about road transportation costs. Two of the companies are from north America: one is KPMG Montreal and the other is Crowley Maritime. One company is from Austria, four are from France and two are from Germany and there is one each from Italy and Japan. Those involved in the manufacturing industry will recognise those companies as freight forwarding agencies, rather than road haulage companies.

The company of most interest to the United Kingdom is Brian Yeardley Continental Ltd. I have corresponded with Mr. Yeardley for some time and I telephoned him today. He is amazed that he has been cited as the source of the beneficial regime in the road haulage industry. He can conclude only that, as he files his accounts in February, his accounts for 1997 were used as evidence. He reminded me this morning that, when the Conservatives left power, only Luxembourg, Belgium and Spain had cheaper diesel than the United Kingdom.

There is a fundamental misunderstanding in this area. I think that we should put the KPMG report behind us and the Government should forget this unhappy episode. They have tried to hang everything on the report and it is unfortunate that KPMG has been dragged into the argument. It has conducted an interesting survey of business costs which, I am delighted to say, proves that Telford—which was in Shropshire, but is now a unitary authority—is the best place to invest.

Of all the people to choose, Mr. Yeardley is possibly the worst example because 20 of his 95 trucks are already flagged out to Luxembourg. He made it clear this morning that, unless he receives satisfaction from the forum—I welcome that body and am delighted that it has been established, even though it is nine months too late—and sees some improvement in the current regime, all his trucks will be flagged out to Luxembourg. Mr. Yeardley said:

"I would be stupid not to as the advantages are so good."

Mr. Yeardley warned me before the Budget—this is an important point for Government Members—that he issues weekly bulletins to all his drivers informing them of the cheapest fuel on offer in each European country and advising them not to take on fuel in the United Kingdom. He said:

"Our depot fuel facility is locked and special permission required to use it."

I know of another company in Kettering that has not filled up a truck in this country since autumn 1997. That is not surprising, because Mr. Yeardley gave me a list of

the prices that he pays in the United Kingdom. He pays £702 for 1,200 litres of regular diesel and £690 for ultra-low sulphur diesel, which is levied at 1p less a litre. That means that there is a £260.60 price difference if his drivers fill up in France, a £330 difference per truck every time his drivers fill up in Belgium and an incredible £350.40 if they fill up in Luxembourg. We cannot blame Mr. Yeardley for actively considering moving his entire fleet to Luxembourg.

Mr. Swayne: Is my hon. Friend not being somewhat optimistic by expressing the pious hope that something positive will emanate from the consultative group? The Chief Secretary set the tone in his speech when he told us that there was overcapacity in the industry and that most of the problems were caused by fuel inefficiency in that industry.

Mr. Paterson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. Thanks to the campaign fought by this party—with the full co-operation of the trucking industry—we have at last got a forum and the Government are finally beginning to listen.

My next example is even worse. The dairy built by Müllers is the huge success story in my constituency. The 120 million litres of milk transported to that dairy every year are carried by diesel-fuelled trucks and every one of the 750 million pots of yoghurt is carried by a diesel-fuelled truck. There was an opening at the dairy on Monday—conducted with great grace by Joanna Lumley—and I took the opportunity to talk to Mr. Mattmer, the Bavarian head of the company's logistics division.

I received details of the company's operations. It runs 50 trucks in the United Kingdom and 230 trucks in Germany. Before it built the plant, it ran weekly truckloads from Germany. Running a truck for 100,000 miles a year at an average of eight miles a gallon, the company estimates that there is a difference between the two countries of £18,056.35 on fuel, road tax and insurance. That is a huge sum, and the company told me quite clearly that, unless the regime is changed, trucks in Market Drayton will soon bear German number plates because the German Government have adopted a more sensible attitude to vehicle excise duty. The company is also considering moving to Luxembourg.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): It is only a matter of time before the same thing happens in Northern Ireland. At present, drivers can save £230 on a 250 gallon tank, and no fuel duty revenue goes to the United Kingdom Exchequer. There is already a £4,000 differential on vehicle excise duty. Is it the Government's policy to destroy the road freight industry in Northern Ireland? Is that how they will assist the achievement of a united Ireland? Urgent action must be taken. Is it not a coincidence that tonight's edition of the *Belfast Telegraph* carries the report that 30 vehicles have been seized in the past week by Customs and Excise, despite the fact that, two years ago, I asked for additional customs officers to be made available? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government must show that they intend to protect our road freight industry?

Mr. Paterson: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that powerful intervention. Unfortunately, I do not have the figures before me, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) asked the Government how much excise duty was lost in Northern Ireland because of smuggling over the border to the Republic of Ireland. My right hon. Friend received the incredible answer that the Government did not know. That is an absolutely astonishing admission: the Government simply do not care.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Smuggling is an illegal activity, so how does he expect the Government to know how much revenue has been lost?

Mr. Paterson: If trucks from Northern Ireland refuel south of the border, revenue is lost to the Government.

Mention has been made of the beneficial corporation tax rate. It is interesting to note that, although the Labour party in opposition fought every reduction in corporation tax, it is now hanging much on it in terms of the road haulage industry. I urge Labour Members to listen to the following fairly simple figures—they do not need to concentrate quite as hard as the Deputy Prime Minister might. For a typical company with 10 trucks turning over £1 million a year, with each truck doing 100,000 miles at £1 a mile, the fuel element is about 35p a mile. Following the tremendous hike in the Budget, the VED on the 10 40-tonne trucks will be £57,500, with a total of £407,500 on fuel—

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend makes a powerful case. Does he agree that fuel excise duties disproportionately affect rural communities and rural companies? Only this afternoon, I spoke to a haulier, Jim Welch of Fowler Welch, and he agreed that fuel duty is particularly damaging because of local links with the agriculture and food industries. Rural Britain is disproportionately affected by the Government's swingeing increases—which is typical of a Government who have done so much to damage the countryside.

Mr. Paterson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; he understands rural affairs very well. The increases have a crippling effect on constituencies such as ours, where 97 per cent. of freight is carried by road.

I shall finish citing the profit figures. If the company in question has a 3 per cent. profit margin—which is highly unlikely, given the losses and the number of people going out of business—corporation tax will be £6,000. That is nothing compared with a bill for £407,500. The Government do not understand the damage that they are doing to haulage businesses all over the country. Nor do they understand that there is a knock-on effect, because companies that cannot use flagged-out businesses from abroad will have to absorb increased prices. Every business in this country is made less competitive and less efficient than it would be if the Government had a more realistic regime on VED and fuel duty, such as those that prevail in other continental countries.

6.30 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Following the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) is like following a heavy goods vehicle uphill—he has a billowing exhaust and he does not make much progress. I know that he has made this issue his own as far as the regional press in the west midlands is concerned.

[Mr. Peter Snape]

Like most Conservative Members in supposedly safe Tory seats, the hon. Gentleman scraped home at the last election. I wonder what he said to his pals in the road haulage industry about those four Budgets from 1993 to 1997 when the fuel tax escalator was increased by a proportionately far higher amount than the increase under this Government. I remind him that inflation was running out of control at certain times during the previous Conservative Government's period in office. As the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker), reminded us, a minimum increase of 5 per cent. above inflation in those days was much more damaging to the road haulage industry than anything that this Government have done.

I concede that, with his selective use of statistics, the hon. Member for North Shropshire has captured many headlines in the regional press. It is a great pity that some of the people who read those headlines were not here to hear him stuttering through the report which he read rather badly and extremely selectively.

The motion refers to 53,000 redundancies in the road haulage industry. Nobody, not even Conservative Front Benchers, believes those figures. I have heard an attempted justification of them by the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), who will wind up the debate for the Conservatives. I remind him and the Conservative party that, when I began to work on the railway, over 40 years ago, about 150,000 people were employed in that industry, many of them in the freight moving business. There are not nearly as many of them now, and not many tears, crocodile or otherwise, were shed by the Conservative party when those jobs were lost, partly because of the incompetence of railway management.

I have to say that, when looking back to when the railway industry was in the public sector, I do not recognise the golden age, particularly in freight, that some of my hon. Friends talk about. Much rail freight was lost by incompetence by railway management in the past two decades, but much more of it was lost because of the fiscal unfairness and financial imbalance between the road haulage industry and the rail freight business.

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Mr. Snape: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman. He ambled in at the last minute and he has already intervened twice. I do not have the time, let alone the inclination, to take his intervention.

Mr. Hayes: I was just trying to bring the hon. Gentleman back to reality.

Mr. Snape: I am grateful, but, if I came back to reality accompanied by the hon. Gentleman, I would not be here—that is a dead cert.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Should the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) not declare an interest?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Hon. Members must not conduct conversations across the Chamber from a sedentary position.

Mr. Snape: If the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) reads the rules, he will realise that I have no need to declare an interest. I shall concede, if that is the right word—I am proud of this fact—that I am still a member of, and pay my subs to, the RMT. I am not paid for that representation, unlike some Conservative Members.

I return to my central point. The imbalance in taxation has brought about the present situation in the road haulage industry. I do not underestimate the problems caused to smaller owner-driver companies by the fuel tax escalator, but members of the Road Haulage Association will be the first to say privately that there is considerable overcapacity in the industry. Whatever many of them say about the price of diesel, they seem to find enough money to drive around and around our major towns and cities to make their protest, and they will say that, at that end of the market, people will cut each other's throat for a back load.

There is no doubt that there is considerable wastage in the road haulage industry: one has only to drive up and down our roads and motorways to see how many empty heavy goods vehicles there are. Unless we get taxation right, putting more freight on the railway system is likely to continue to be an uphill battle, despite the best efforts of English, Welsh and Scottish Railways.

The hon. Member for North Essex, who is winding up the debate, said earlier that the crippling tax system was having a distorting effect on the road haulage industry. I repeat a remark that I made when I intervened on the hon. Member for Lewes: every survey has shown that, at the heavier end of the heavy lorry market, companies do not pay their full track costs. The size of their lorries and the length of their journeys mean that they are the very people who are in direct competition with the rail freight industry, which for many years has been forced to pay its full track costs and, under the previous Conservative Government, achieve an 8 per cent. return as well. Where is the fairness and sense in that?

No Labour Member would claim that the railway industry could carry all, or even a major proportion of, the freight that is on our roads at present, but it could certainly carry a lot more if we did not have a fiscal imbalance.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport, who will wind up the debate, will make it clear to the road haulage industry that we cannot tolerate the behaviour that it has demonstrated. That behaviour has been supported by Conservative Members. A former leader of the Tory party and Prime Minister would, whenever there was an industrial dispute, point at the Labour Benches and invite Labour Members utterly to condemn that dispute. We have had pretty mealy-mouthed condemnation of the present situation by the Conservative party, which is not the party of law and order because the Conservatives destroyed both when they were in power. Law and order do not mean much to them when their friends are misbehaving.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will bear it in mind that any concession made as a result of activities by road hauliers will lead to many other people behaving in the same way. The road haulage industry had better distance itself from present events. I am second to nobody in the House in my admiration for Mr. Steven Norris, who currently heads the Road Haulage

Association. His industry, at work and elsewhere, is a great example to us all, but he ought to be more upfront in his condemnation of present activities.

Mr. Paterson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Snape: No.

We cannot have blackmail, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will make it plain to the reputable sector of the road haulage industry that it has its forum and it had better wait for the outcome, instead of holding our towns and cities to ransom, as it is doing.

6.37 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I make no apology for supporting business in this debate, because the Government are putting business under pressure. I am a little surprised that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) did not mention his chairmanship of the bus division of the National Express Group and all the subsidiary boards of which he is a member, because I would be astonished if he was not paid for those directorships. The Government have extended the bus fuel duty rebate, so his industry is protected from the fuel duty increase in the Budget, and I am not surprised that he is happy to support the Government in this debate.

Mr. Snape: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: No, the hon. Gentleman would not give way to anyone in his speech, so I shall not give way to him.

Mr. Snape: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has just attacked me and will not now give way. I put it on the record that it is not necessary for me to declare any interest that is in the Register of Members' Interests, particularly when I am speaking in a debate that has no relevance to the bus and coach industry. I am proud to be a chairman of a bus company, something that the hon. Gentleman will never be.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Jenkin: The volume of rail freight has increased because our policy of privatisation brought private investment into the rail industry, and we are pleased about that.

The debate has been dominated by the issue of the fuel escalator, which was raised by the Chief Secretary. I point out to him that when we left office, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) pointed out, only three countries in the European Union had a diesel price lower than that in the United Kingdom. The massive differential in diesel prices has opened up under this Government. The Chief Secretary seems unable to understand that an environmental tax would not cease to be an environmental incentive if the Government froze it. Tax would still be 85 per cent. of the cost of diesel. We do not propose to make a dramatic alteration to that duty. We want to reverse the increase announced in the Budget and to discontinue the fuel duty escalator. It is not acceptable for the Government to cower behind silly words to the effect that it is somehow our responsibility that they keep increasing taxes.

The Conservative party's record on the environment is unimpeachable. When we were in office, we met all the targets. The Labour party inherited environmental targets that were eminently achievable, if only it would pursue them. To say that our tax announcements would leave a hole in the Government's finances, when they are raising an extra £9 billion—*[Interruption.]* No, the Government are increasing the tax take by £9 billion over and above Conservatives' tax plans for the lifetime of this Parliament. If the Chief Secretary does not have money coming out of his ears, I suggest that he consider the spending side of his equation, as opposed to the taxation side. For the Government to retreat behind the suggestion that other business taxes somehow offset the huge cost disadvantage caused by fuel duties and vehicle excise duty is ridiculous.

The Government cannot dismiss the Brit disc on the basis that there is some Brussels diktat which means that we cannot introduce it. The proposal from the European Union, which is on the Minister's desk —he probably does not even know about it—and which requires our consent for France to give a fuel duty rebate to its own road hauliers, gives the lie to that idea. I assure the Minister that the Conservative party will not allow some silly Brussels diktat to stand in the way of a fair deal for the UK road haulage industry.

The Government were elected on a promise—a vow explicitly given by the Prime Minister—not to raise taxes. He claimed that

"our policies need no new taxes at all".

We have called this debate not only because the Government have flagrantly broken their own tax pledge, but because Labour's tax increases are having a devastating effect on UK competitiveness in general, as well as on the road haulage industry in particular.

While the Government say, "Crisis, what crisis?", it is clear that the industry is indeed in crisis. The Government should take this opportunity, as I know the Minister of Transport would dearly love to do, to show that they have listened. However, the only way to prove that is to act.

Today, we have announced that the fuel duty escalator should end. Next week, we shall vote to reverse the Government's fuel duty increases, giving all Labour Members the opportunity to show that they have listened. Today, we are also promoting our proposal for the Brit disc, which would mean that foreign hauliers would have to pay to use British roads just as UK hauliers have to pay for using many roads on the continent. That is a first step to removing the competitive disadvantages that the Government have heaped on UK business.

Will the Minister confirm—

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: No, I shall not.

Will the Minister confirm that the Deputy Prime Minister got it completely wrong last week? Will he confirm that the Government are indeed considering the Brit disc idea, and that that means unpicking the Budget in order to be able to cut VED rates with the proceeds of the Brit disc? If he introduces a Euro vignette, it will simply be an extra tax on the road haulage industry unless he applies the revenue to the reduction of VED.

[Mr. Jenkin]

Will the Minister admit that the Government have created cost disadvantages for the UK haulage sector and all who are dependent on it? The Government do not need to take just our word for it. The managing director of Fergusons of Northumberland wrote that he had had a meeting with Nissan:

"The meeting was to inform me that we had been unsuccessful in our bid for a new contract which they had decided to award to a Dutch . . . company, which, they said, was purely on the basis of price . . . we are unable to maintain a competitive edge in the UK let alone Europe".

Mr. Ken Willis in the west country said:

"The Government know they have a captive market-we have to either pay up or go under."

Mr. John Newton of NWT of Buckinghamshire complained:

"our foreign competitors have a 16 per cent. advantage over domestic hauliers . . . The effect on tens of thousands of jobs . . . will be catastrophic."

The truth is that the Government are still deeply in denial. At the Freight Transport Association conference, the Minister of Transport claimed that he was

"convinced that you do not suffer from any serious competition"

and that

"the fuel duty escalator is here to stay".

The farce of the KPMG report underlines the Government's sheer cynicism and ignorance. The report is intended as a guide for certain types of industrial and service businesses which may be deciding where to locate their operations. It is not aimed at the road haulage sector; nor is it an indication of that sector's competitiveness.

I have spoken to KPMG. It has been taken for a ride by the Government. KPMG will not assume any responsibility for the way in which the Minister and his colleagues have been using the figures. Nevertheless, the Minister is shamelessly using the figures from the report to try to support his ludicrous claims that Government tax policies have not made UK road hauliers uncompetitive.

In fact, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) explained, the reason Britain and Austria offer the lowest road freight costs is what is called our "compact market areas"—that is, our trucks have to travel the shortest distances, in the UK. This factor is utterly irrelevant to the costs per mile of running a UK-registered truck on UK-purchased fuel in competition with EU hauliers on the same roads.

I have written to the Minister to invite him to agree with the industry a proper remit for a proper report that is explicitly about the competitiveness of the road haulage sector, to be commissioned from KPMG or any other reputable firm. That has not been agreed to by the forum. The right hon. Gentleman wants to keep it all in house so that he can control the information. I do not see how the dispute with KPMG can be cleared up unless KPMG issues a clear statement, so I invite KPMG to do so. If it declines, one must ask why it does not want clarity in respect of the information in its report. There has been more of a misunderstanding between KPMG in London and KPMG in Canada than the right hon. Gentleman is prepared to admit.

Why does the Minister not take the advice of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who asked him in the House last week:

"Will my right hon. Friend ask his officials, or Treasury officials, to dig out the figures that really matter in this whole argument—the transport cost per tonne per kilometre, by road and by rail, in each European country, including the United Kingdom?"—[*Official Report*, 13 April 1999; Vol. 329, c. 9.]

That is the sort of analysis that is needed, not the hijacking of some other irrelevant report.

As it is, the survey data used in the KPMG report to calculate road freight costs are probably more than two years out of date and do not reflect Labour's first three Budgets. On top of that, the data are based on only one UK haulier, Brian Yeardley Continental Ltd., of Featherstone in West Yorkshire. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire pointed out, Mr. Yeardley wrote to us:

"The Chancellor has ensured that we are uncompetitive against foreign hauliers"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Conversations are breaking out across the Chamber. Hon. Members must listen to the hon. Gentleman who is addressing the House. *[Interruption.]* I repeat: order.

Mr. Jenkin: I was reading an extract from a fax from the company that is the subject of the KPMG report. The fax states:

"The Chancellor has ensured that we are uncompetitive against foreign hauliers . . . Each of our vehicles must earn seventeen thousand pounds more annually than our European competitors to cover these extra tax costs."

Finally, Mr. Yeardley, whom the Government would present as the model example of the competitiveness of UK haulage under Labour, has confirmed that his company is one of those that will be flagging out their vehicles to escape Labour's crippling taxes. Nothing could demonstrate more graphically the hopeless fraud of the Government's position. The very evidence that they are using can be exposed as, first, utterly irrelevant, and secondly, out of date; thirdly, it can be confounded by the very facts of the example that the Government are seeking to deploy.

We urge the Government to listen. If 50,000 jobs at Longbridge are worth a subsidy of £175 million when there is massive overcapacity in the motor industry, why will the Government not listen to one of Britain's other vital industries? We urge the Government to scrap the fuel duty escalator, which has now gone far beyond any environmental justification. We urge the Government to reverse the fuel duty increases that they imposed in the Budget, and we commend the Brit disc as a vital first step towards a fair deal for British hauliers and for British business as a whole.

6.49 pm

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): This has been an important debate, announced as such by the Conservatives and lauded as their major campaign. It is therefore rather a tragedy that for most of the debate there were no more than three Conservative Back Benchers present in the Chamber. Indeed, at one stage I calculated that all the Conservative Back-Bench and Front-Bench Members could be fitted into the cabin of a 3x3 six-axle

articulated truck. When the Conservatives make promises to people outside the House, they should make sure that they keep those promises—at least by turning out to participate in the debate.

The Government recognise the contribution of the road haulage industry to the economy and the well-being of the country. That is why, since we came to power, we have tried to work with the industry. That is why we took such time and such care to develop and publish our strategy on sustainable distribution. We produced a document in consultation with the road haulage industry that was welcomed by the industry only two months ago.

We have developed that partnership into the road haulage forum. It is a calumny to suggest that the Government started talking to the industry only during the past few weeks. We have been doing so from the day that we took power. We have established the road haulage forum to bring together the hauliers' representatives and Ministers to address the problems facing sections of that industry.

Of course, we cannot, and I will not, promise that in this or any other industry no job will ever be lost. That would be an unrealistic and cruel illusion of the sort that is sometimes attributed to old Labour, but which is increasingly associated with the new Conservatives, such as the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson).

The hon. Gentleman seems obsessed with the report by KPMG and with claims that he claims were made on the basis of that report, which I have never made, and the accusation that that was done without the knowledge or acceptance of KPMG; whereas I explained to him that I went out of my way to invite KPMG to be present as observers when I made my comments on it. I am only sorry that the hon. Gentleman has not been in the House long enough to develop the courtesy or the courage to apologise when he is wrong.

I cannot promise, and nor can my colleagues, a blank cheque from the taxpayer to cover the costs—financial, physical, social or environmental—that any industry incurs. That would not be fair to the taxpayer or, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) pointed out, to the industry's competitors in the rail freight business. However, I can promise that I have listened and will continue to listen to the industry's concerns, and that we will do all we can to ensure that it remains at the forefront of efficiency and competitiveness.

That approach was rejected tonight by the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) and by several of his hon. Friends. They are walking the tightrope and trying to disguise that fact with their weasel words and their refusal to condemn the disruption that has been imposed on the citizens of this country. In the words that their former leader used in such circumstances, they are too frit to stand up to the militants who want to bully the Government into changing political decisions of the House, as enshrined in the Budget.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Big man.

Dr. Reid: Exactly—unable to stand up to the big mouths of the industry, as the hon. Gentleman says.

It is not I who maintain that the road haulage forum is constructive. Let me quote the Freight Transport Association after the first meeting, which stated that it was

"very impressed and encouraged by the will, intent and urgency of the Forum to get to grips with our industry's problems without delay".

Those are not my words, but the words of responsible elements in the road haulage industry.

I repeat what I have said before: the Conservative party will choose either dialogue or disruption as the way forward. I am glad that the spokesman for the Liberal party, the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker), regardless of his criticisms, showed that he was on the side of rationality and dialogue—as opposed to the Conservatives, who seem intent on encouraging and inciting disruption.

Mr. Baldry *rose—*

Mr. Paterson *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Dr. Reid: It is too late for cringing apologies.

Mr. Baldry: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister has not had the courtesy to give way. At no time during my speech or that of my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) did we encourage disruption. I hope the Minister will have the courtesy to acknowledge that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. It is a point for debate.

Dr. Reid: That is precisely why I referred to the hon. Gentleman's words as weasel words. We should have heard thorough condemnation of the disruption that has taken place in Britain. Tonight's debate has allowed a great—

Mr. Paterson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it a point of debate to misinterpret what an hon. Member has said? I went out of my way to make it clear at every meeting of the haulage industry that I have attended that I condemn—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Such points made in debate by hon. Members are not a matter for the Chair. They are a matter for debate.

Dr. Reid: The Opposition's attempts to talk out my contribution will not work. I shall continue until I have finished.

Tonight's debate has allowed many hon. Members to express their concerns, some warranted and others less well founded, about the future of the haulage industry and also about wider issues such as the environment, a matter that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley). It has allowed us, at least on this side of the House, to look at the multiplicity of factors affecting the industry, rather than concentrating myopically on only one form of tax classification or one aspect of the fiscal duties imposed by the Government.

The debate has allowed us to lay before the House the range of assistance that the Government are already providing to an industry that is basically sound, but

[Dr. Reid]

elements of which are undergoing the pains of overcapacity. Above all, it has allowed us to expose the hollowness of the Opposition case—or the hogwash, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) called it.

We have seen the Tory party reduced to arguing tonight that the prime factor in business success or failure is not the market, but Government intervention; demanding that we accept European priorities on taxation, rather than British priorities; and meekly acquiescing in industrial and social disruption to change the democratic decisions of the House.

The Tories' case this evening has been based on three propositions. The first is that the British haulage industry is uncompetitive by international standards. The second is that any difficulties being faced by that industry must be the result of Government policy. The third proposition is that the Conservative party is in no way associated with those policies. The first proposition is just plain wrong. The second is a gross over-simplification. The third—that the Tories are not associated with those policies—is the most brazen piece of political hypocrisy camouflaged as righteous indignation, even by the standards of the Tory party of the 1990s.

Let us turn to one or two of the issues that the Opposition have raised—the fuel duty escalator, for instance. They turned up, crying their tears, an onion in one hand and a Yorkie bar in the other, declaring that they were the hauliers' friends and that they have just discovered the fuel duty escalator. The Conservatives thought up the fuel duty escalator: theirs is the party that introduced it; theirs is the party that maintained it between 1993 and 1997; theirs is the party that increased it. Yet they have the cheek to raise it tonight.

Who was the Treasury Minister responsible—the Paymaster General—when the Conservatives introduced the fuel duty escalator? Who was the man who introduced, maintained and increased it? I shall tell the House who: none other than the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory).

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The right hon. Gentleman is incorrect. Will he withdraw what he has said? If he looks at the record, he will discover that I was not Paymaster General when the fuel duty escalator was introduced. Will he correct the record for the benefit of the House?

Dr. Reid: I shall check the record, although the right hon. Gentleman would be the first to admit that he paraded through the country defending the fuel duty escalator. Will he deny that?

As the Tories go round the country, they claim that of every £10 that is spent on fuel, £8.50 is tax. What they do not mention is that of that £8.50, £7.70 was tax when they left office two years ago. They make claims about the increase in the fuel duty escalator. Under this Government, there has been an increase of 7p a litre in the fuel duty escalator, but under their Government, the increase was 26p. The Tories talk about hauliers going out of business—tragically, some of them are—but 5,000 hauliers lost their jobs under the previous Conservative Government. There is a problem with the haulage industry; the main one is overcapacity. That is one of the things that we want to address in the haulage forum.

Some of these Conservatives spoke as though they had just discovered unemployment, as if it were some unknown phenomenon before it afflicted sections of the haulage industry. I can tell them that we on the Government Benches understand unemployment only too well. We saw it, felt it, suffered it in our towns, villages and communities day after day, week after week, under almost 20 years of Conservative rule. We are neither immune to nor surprised by the effects of unemployment on individuals in the haulage industry. We saw unemployment in whole industries, such as mining and steel and printing. I only wish that, instead of the crocodile teeth then, we had seen today's crocodile tears.

I am precluded from addressing some of the other issues raised owing to the number of participants in the debate, but I shall end my remarks with one point. The Conservatives ought to be very careful how far they swing on the pendulum. I understand that last night, under the birth of new Conservatism, the deputy leader of the Conservative party walked away from the free market, telling us that the free market had a limited role. In this debate, we have not even seen new Conservatism; we have seen nouvelle Conservatism.

The new Tories are asking us to believe that job losses are the fault of Government, not of the market, that British taxes should be set not by our people but by Luxembourg and France, that disruptive action by militants should be condoned and dialogue ignored. They are not on a U-turn; they are on a roundabout.

The motion smacks of opportunism and hypocrisy. As their last Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), said when he introduced the fuel duty escalator, anyone who pretends to support a balance of environmental considerations but attacks the escalator is sailing close to hypocrisy. There is a mayday signal coming from the Tories because they are on a tidal wave of hypocrisy. That is why they will not receive the support of the House in the Lobby.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 139, Noes 341.

Division No. 148] **[7.5 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward

Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Caroline Spelman and Mrs. Eleanor Laing.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*

King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dan *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. David Jamieson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 160.

Division No. 149] **[7.18 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*

Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House believes that everyone, including hauliers, must play their part in reducing emissions of carbon dioxide from transport, and that the road fuel duty escalator first introduced by the last Government acts as an incentive to greater fuel efficiency; deplores the hypocrisy of the Conservative Party for doing one thing in Government and another in Opposition; calls on it to explain which areas of public spending it would cut in order to pay for the abandonment of the fuel escalator; welcomes this Government's commitment to promoting a more dynamic business sector, in particular the measures taken to help the road haulage industry, including cuts in the corporation tax rates, freezing the rates of vehicle excise duty for most lorries for two years running, doubling the maximum reduction in vehicle excise duty for cleaner lorries, and reducing duty rates on ultra-low sulphur diesel relative to ordinary diesel; notes that the UK haulage industry benefits from the total tax burden on business in the UK being lower than that of other major EU member states, and lower than the average for the EU and the OECD; believes that the environmental measures this Government has introduced will play an important part in encouraging use of more fuel-efficient vehicles, cleaner fuels and greener modes of transport; and welcomes the dialogue that is now taking place between the industry and the Government in the Road Haulage Forum.

British Livestock Farming

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.29 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the collapse in farm incomes, especially in the livestock sector; expresses astonishment at Labour's claims to be the party of the countryside; condemns the Government's dismissive response to the deepening crisis in pig farming; deplores the lack of progress in restoring beef exports and ending the ban on beef on the bone; calls for a postponement of the imposition of further charges on slaughter houses; urges that Milk Marque be allowed to invest in processing capacity; recognises that British farmers work at a competitive disadvantage compared with those abroad because of excessive and unnecessary regulations; expresses dismay at the outcome of the European Agenda 2000 negotiations when a poor deal for British farmers, consumers and taxpayers was made worse by the Prime Minister; and calls for the reversal of all those government policies which are damaging the rural economy, the agricultural industry and the British countryside.

The debate is timely and necessary. Despite the widely acknowledged crisis in agriculture, this is only the second occasion on which the Minister has taken part in a full-scale debate on the subject since his appointment in July. Both debates—today's debate, and the debate in November—were held in Opposition time. If it had been left to Labour, the House would simply have ignored the destruction of Britain's livestock industry. That is a clear sign that this Government—I do not say "this Minister"—neither care about nor want to understand the problems of agriculture, and it is a clear sign that farming and the countryside are at the bottom of the Government's priorities, despite the existence of a crisis that becomes daily more acute.

Over the past two years, farm incomes have fallen by more than 50 per cent., and in the livestock sector, the position is even worse. Many businesses are losing money and struggling for survival. After two years of Labour government, farmers now need more than the warm words and sympathy for which the present Minister is famous. I pay tribute to his willingness to listen, and to travel—unlike his predecessor—even to parts of the country that are not served by Concorde, and I believe that he genuinely cares about the problems of farmers. The trouble is that caring is not enough: the Minister must also act, because he will be judged by deeds, not words. I shall be explaining how a Conservative Government would act.

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): With BSE.

Mr. Yeo: I shall return to that shortly. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) may think that the main problem for pig, sheep and dairy farmers is directly related to BSE. If he and his colleagues care so little about a serious livestock crisis that all they can do is roar with laughter, I hope that farmers throughout the country will receive that message.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): While Labour Back Benchers snigger at the fate of British farmers, may I ask my hon. Friend to bear in mind—particularly when he visits Market Harborough on Friday—that livestock incomes and morale have fallen in my area, while Government-imposed costs have risen? Moreover,

we face the spectre of the encroaching tuberculosis that is affecting bovine herds. Can my hon. Friend say something that will improve the common sense of Labour Members?

Mr. Yeo: I look forward to my visit to my hon. and learned Friend's constituency. He will be glad to know that nearly every measure that I suggest this evening could be taken by Britain acting alone, would not cost anything and would be implemented by a Government for whom farming and the countryside were a real priority.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government do not seem to care about the countryside because they do not represent the countryside? Labour Members laugh, but Labour's pole position rural constituency ranks 32nd among the most rural constituencies in Britain. Across Britain, the Conservatives gained 120,000 more votes than Labour in the most rural seats, and in terms of speeches, interventions and oral and written questions, Labour Members have signally failed—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This has become an extremely long intervention. I remind the House that many hon. Members want to speak, and that too many interventions that are too long will damage their chances of being called.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) was making a powerful point, to great effect. I know that he has researched the issue extremely carefully, and is about to produce powerful evidence to demonstrate the Government's failure to represent rural Britain.

The fact is that, week by week, pig farmers are going bust, slaughterhouses are closing down, dairy farmers are on their knees, beef remains unexported, and time is running out. This crisis is not about fat cats getting thinner; it is about small businesses going bust, and about men and women seeing a lifetime's work destroyed by the inaction of a Labour Government. Not only farmers are suffering. The Government need to understand that the whole rural economy—the very fabric of the countryside—is now under threat. These difficulties may not matter to Labour Members, but they matter to the country, and they should matter to the House.

Let us start with the pig industry. Last autumn, pig prices fell to 60p per deadweight kilogram. That is the lowest price for more than 20 years, and is half the 1997 level. Although there has been some recovery since then, British pig farmers are still losing money for the eighth month running, and many are going out of business altogether. Britain's breeding herd declined by 11 per cent. in 1998. When the market does improve, continental pig farmers will be best placed to benefit.

The Government's dismissive response to the report on pigs produced by the Select Committee on Agriculture was rightly condemned by the British Pig Industry Support Group, which commented:

"The Government proved to be complacent to the point of incredulity."

British pig producers are required to operate to higher standards than those abroad, and consumers are shocked when they learn that some of the pigmeat sold in British supermarkets has been produced in ways that are not even allowed in this country.

When we debated the issue on 4 November, the Minister told us:

"I hope that the Opposition . . . will welcome the agreement that I reached yesterday with the British Retail Consortium that supermarkets will not sell imported meat processed in the UK under a British label . . . The major retailers . . . have assured me also that, from 1 January 1999, all pigmeat sold in their outlets will be from animals raised to high welfare standards, with no stalls and tethers and no meat and bonemeal feedstuffs."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 1998; Vol. 318, c. 952.]

We welcomed that statement, but unfortunately it turned out not to be true. In his eagerness to deflect criticism, the Minister exaggerated the commitment made by the retailers. I hope that any announcement he makes today will have been more carefully checked in advance. Last November, it turned out that, far from applying to all pigmeat as the Minister had claimed, the pledge applied only to fresh pork, and only to own-label products, not to leading market brands.

I invite the Minister to improve labelling, so that all pigmeat sold in Britain is labelled with the country of origin—where the pigs are actually reared, rather than where the meat has been processed—and with the method of production, so that consumers who want to support high animal welfare standards of the kind required of British farmers can choose to do so. All pigmeat—indeed, all meat sold anywhere in Europe—should be labelled in that way, but Britain could set an example immediately and voluntarily. Will the Minister call in the retailers next week to discuss the matter? Why cannot British consumers be told how the meat that they are buying has been produced?

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): My hon. Friend is right. My correspondence with the British Retail Consortium following the Minister's statement shows that a vast range of products—pies, sausages, cured hams and bacon—represent a high percentage of the pork that is sold in this country. In that sector particularly, the Minister's pledge on labelling needs to be addressed.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend has great experience and expertise in these matters, and she is entirely right.

I also think that the Minister should test whether the import of illegally produced pigmeat into Britain could be halted altogether, possibly by the use of article 36 of the treaty of Rome. We know to our cost just how easy it was for other countries to halt the export of British beef, so why not at least give this a try? If a legal challenge follows—if the Minister tries, and is beaten—he will not be criticised by us, or by farmers or consumers. Indeed, we would salute his efforts.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Does my hon. Friend think that the Minister would be well advised to explain why, in a written answer to me a few days ago, he said that he had no intention of exploring that avenue?

Mr. Yeo: The Minister more or less confirmed that in a letter that he wrote to me last week.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): The answer is quite simple: it is illegal.

Mr. Yeo: The Minister has published no legal opinion to back up that assertion.

[Mr. Yeo]

According to my observation of what has happened in the European Union over the past few years, many other countries are willing to challenge the system. Why are the British Government more keen to keep friendly with their allies on the continent than they are to look after the interests of British farmers?

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): What view does my hon. Friend take of the subsidies being paid by the French Government to the French pig industry, and the legality of those payments?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend anticipates the very next point that I was going to make.

Earlier this month, the French Government announced that more than £14 million of national aid would be paid to their pig farmers—on top of two previous aid packages, worth £50 million, which have been challenged by the European Commission. Will the Minister now challenge that unlawful national aid from the French Government to their pig farmers, which puts British pig producers at yet more of a disadvantage?

Mr. Nick Brown: I can give the hon. Gentleman the commitment for which he asks. If he gives me clear evidence of illegal state aids being paid by another member state—he cites the case of France—we shall complain, directly and at once, to the Commission.

Mr. Yeo: If the Minister would like to second some of the staff whom he has at his disposal, and give them to me for a month, I certainly shall provide very detailed evidence.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): While I might have some sympathy for the Minister, will my hon. Friend suggest to him that the best way forward would be to ask the British embassy in Paris to make the ordinary inquiries?

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. and learned Friend is quite right. Moreover, the matter has already been widely reported in the farming press. I find it astonishing that the Minister is asking me for the evidence. If he will say on the record that those stories are not true, I hope that that also will be reported in the farming press. We shall see what type of debate results from it.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, who is giving way generously. Does he understand that a young pig farmer—Mr. James King, from Cowley farm, Preston Bissett, near Buckingham—in my constituency is extremely proud of the fact that he has received absolutely no state subsidies? His gripe is not that he receives no subsidies, but that other European pig industries do—and that the Government are not fighting for Britain, but standing aside while his industry is damaged by the Government's indifference.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is right. It is important that people should understand that the pig sector is outside the common agricultural policy regime and does not receive subsidy. Too many people think that pig farmers are treated in the same way as other farmers and are able to collect payments under the CAP, but they are not, and they do not wish to. They simply wish to have the level playing field to which my hon. Friend refers.

I hope that the Government will pledge that all the pigmeat bought by any public sector body now meets British welfare standards. It would be a disgrace if public money were being used to support illegally produced meat and to import it into the United Kingdom.

I will now deal with the mounting problem of slaughterhouses. Over the past two years, slaughterhouses in the United Kingdom have been closing at the rate of one every 10 days. All too often, we hear reports of slaughterhouses where there are more veterinary inspectors than there are staff. It is not hard to imagine the frustration of owners, who have to pay more regulators than employees.

As if that burden were not enough, there is now a threat of even higher inspection charges. In a typical small Devonshire abattoir, where 10 units a week are slaughtered, the charges are likely to rise from £62 a week to more than £300 a week. Those extra charges were due to be introduced on 29 March.

On top of those charges, there is also the threat of a further burden, in the form of £19 million of specified risk material removal charges. The regulation of slaughterhouses is rapidly growing out of all proportion to the risks being addressed.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): The Meat Hygiene Service is becoming a £100-million-a-year monster, which is apparently out of the democratic control of the Government. A small abattoir in Llanrwst has written to me, stating that its cost per beast is £26, and that it will have to close soon, as its continental competitors' costs are only £3 per beast.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is right to bring that matter to the House's attention. I have heard similar reports from other parts of the United Kingdom, demonstrating very vividly the type of burden that British slaughterhouses are now suffering.

As those businesses are destroyed, so the journeys that farm animals have to travel get longer. While the animals suffer longer journeys, the farmers suffer the higher transport costs caused by the higher fuel taxes introduced by the Labour Government.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Is it not ironic that, in the very week that we are having this debate to draw attention to the industry, farmers in my constituency are having to pay an extra charge? Their charge per animal to deal with specified risk material is increasing from £48 to £60. Why are the Government loading on to farmers those extra charges even in the week that we are debating these issues?

Mr. Yeo: The Government are doing so because they have no concern—they do not care—about the problems that they are creating for those small businesses. As the profits of slaughterhouses are destroyed in the way that my hon. Friend has described, so the prices that those slaughterhouses can afford to pay to farmers for their animals decrease. Will the Minister halt the imposition of

any extra charges on Britain's slaughterhouses until and unless he can show that our slaughterhouses are not bearing a heavier burden than their European counterparts?

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us who introduced the Meat Hygiene Service, and how many abattoirs closed between imposition of the service and two years ago?

Mr. Yeo: The Conservative party did not introduce these additional regulations or levy these additional charges. If a Conservative Government were in power today, they would certainly not introduce extra charges on a struggling industry until we had the information that the Minister should have.

Last November, the Minister of State—who is in the Chamber—said in a written answer:

"Information about the level of these charges in other member states is not yet available."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. *105*.]

In another written answer, he stated:

"We do not have specific information on the standard of meat inspection in other EU countries."—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. *248*.]

How can the Government contemplate hitting British slaughterhouses with more costs when they do not even know what those costs are elsewhere in Europe? In the five and a half months since those answers were given, what has the Minister done to collect the necessary figures? Will he publish, today, all the data that he has?

In the past two years, the dairy sector, too, has seen a collapse in its income of almost two thirds. The recent trend in dairy prices has been bleak. The sector's prospects have been made worse by the recent CAP reform outcome. Last September, the Minister said that he intended

"to liberate our dairy industry from the bureaucracy and unfairness of the quota system".

At the beginning of March 1999, the Minister agreed to a package that preserved that quota system for another four years, freezing British milk quotas until 2003. Even the Prime Minister was unimpressed. On 12 March, *The Times* said that his spokesman described it as

"not satisfactory as far as we are concerned".

For once, No. 10 Downing street got it right.

Britain is not self-sufficient in dairy products. Yet, our dairy farmers are in the absurd position of enjoying some of the best dairy-producing countryside in Europe, but of being prevented by the quota system from meeting even home demand. Not for the first time, the Minister's actions fell sadly short of his words—but worse was to come.

At the end of March, when the Heads of Government re-opened the package, the Prime Minister—to secure his cherished headline about saving the overall British budget rebate—made further disastrous concessions. The proposed increase in the British milk quota was put back until 2006. In contrast, four other countries, including Ireland, received an increase in their quota next year. Over the next seven years, Britain's dairy farmers will pay the price of getting the Prime Minister that headline.

Britain entered the CAP negotiations without sufficiently clear objectives and without enough determination to protect British farmers, consumers or taxpayers. That failure will cost us all dear during the next few years.

A further problem is the weakness of the milk producer organisation. Great anxiety now surrounds the Government's attitude towards the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's recommendations on Milk Marque. Nothing must be done to weaken the position of Milk Marque and other producer groups. Milk Marque's wish to invest in processing facilities must be encouraged, so that the balance between producers and other milk processors and retailers can be redressed to allow dairy farmers an adequate return.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Conservatives set up Milk Marque in such a way that it was bound to be attacked because the processors were set at odds with it.

Mr. Yeo: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will write to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make that point and say how important it is that, in considering the recommendations, Milk Marque should be supported and strengthened rather than weakened.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Yeo: The Liberals have already cut 20 minutes from the debate by having an unnecessary Division and I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman. We cannot afford to allow another leadership bid.

The beef sector has also experienced a disastrous collapse in income. Many beef farmers are incurring losses. Last November, the Minister announced triumphantly a European agreement to the lifting of the worldwide ban on the export of British beef. I saluted him for achieving an outcome that had eluded his predecessor.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I do not think that you did.

Mr. Yeo: I did. It is recorded in *Hansard*.

Five months later, not a single ounce of British beef has been exported and there is growing dismay at the Government's failure to secure the implementation of that decision. As usual, once the Prime Minister had got the headline that he wanted, little more effort was made. At the beginning of February the European Commission was surprised that its inspectors had not been invited to examine the facilities in this country. Only last week did the inspectors arrive in Britain. When does the Minister think that beef exports will resume? In view of the continuing delay, will he consider extending the calf processing aid scheme beyond the end of July?

While we wait for progress on that, the Minister has gratuitously knocked confidence in beef by prolonging the domestic ban on beef on the bone. Does he agree with the chief Government scientist, who said that on purely scientific grounds, he did not see much point in banning beef on the bone? Why do the Government not trust the people to decide for themselves whether to eat beef on the bone? Every day that the ban remains, the task of rebuilding confidence in a fine British product is made harder.

[Mr. Yeo]

Is the Minister also aware that fresh dismay has been caused among beef farmers by the letter sent to them by the British cattle movement service? BCMS inspectors will visit to examine cattle, their ear tags and passports, and the records that farmers have to keep to show that all identification requirements are met. Those visits will be made without warning to the farmer. The first paragraph of the circular emphasises that. The third paragraph says that farmers must co-operate fully, and provide suitable handling facilities and people to assist with the animals. How can farmers keep people standing by to assist with inspections if they are not going to be told when the inspections will take place? That further blow to a demoralised industry shows crass insensitivity and will cause conflict.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I have drawn to the Minister's attention the particular problems with regard to tagging that will pertain from 1 January in the New Forest, with stock roaming widely. The Minister has replied that he will wait until 1 January and see whether there is a problem before taking it up with our European partners. I have told him that there will be a problem, as have my constituents. Why is he unable to anticipate any difficulty?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend has put his point so clearly that I hardly need to add anything.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) will deal with the problems of sheep farmers when he winds up, because time has already run on a little.

The livestock industry faces an acute crisis—possibly the worst for a generation. The consequences will hurt all those directly involved, the communities where they live and the environments in which they work. The collapse of prices and incomes threatens the survival of many long-established family farms. Excessive regulation prevents farmers from running their businesses in a common-sense way. Livestock producers are also particularly vulnerable to the consequences of the right to roam—a policy that is misconceived, counter-productive and potentially very costly. The high level of sterling is making imports more attractive to consumers and making exports much harder for producers. It is cutting incomes in the sector.

The Minister has expressed great sympathy for farmers on his travels up and down the country, for which I thank him, but sympathy does not pay the bills. It has to be replaced by action. Farmers around Britain will listen carefully to his speech, but unless he addresses their problems directly, they will be forced to conclude that their worst fears are true: that however much the Minister may want to help them, he is too weak to persuade his Government colleagues to act; that all that he can offer is more fine words; and that the Government have decided cynically that it does not matter what happens to the countryside or to the livestock industry. If that is the case, Labour will stand condemned. Rural communities across Britain will continue to bleed until the return of a Conservative Government.

7.56 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"recognises the difficulties faced by many in the livestock sector; welcomes the Government's strong commitment to the livestock sector in the United Kingdom; endorses the efforts the Government has made to secure the lifting of the ban on the worldwide export of British beef; approves of the steps which the Government has taken since May 1997 to support the beef and sheep industry via EU agri-monetary compensation; welcomes the initiatives the Government has taken to promote the pig industry; recognises the extra support to the livestock sector, particularly hill and upland producers via substantially increased hill livestock compensatory allowances, announced in November 1998; and welcomes the recently-agreed reshaping of the Common Agricultural Policy as part of the Agenda 2000 negotiations, which seeks to provide the livestock sector with stability and a secure future."

If I am to stand condemned, at least it will not be for breaking the law. I accept that the Opposition have raised important subjects, but their analysis is wrong. Since I became Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I have tried to deal with the undoubted difficulties facing the United Kingdom farming sector in a way that addresses the issues on their own terms, not as a party political battleground. The farmers whom I have met have welcomed that approach, because it offers the possibility of discussion about real issues and working towards real solutions. The desire of the Conservatives to turn this into an overtly party political debate serves only to distort their analysis and leads them to advocate impossible solutions to genuine problems. I want to step back from that approach and use the debate objectively to analyse the problems facing the livestock sector and the steps that we can take, and have taken, to help. The amendment offers a constructive way forward.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I do not want to be party political on the issue. Paul Kenny of Standridge farm in Slaidburn came to see me at my surgery last week. His income has declined dramatically over the past two years and he feels that he can no longer make a living as a dairy farmer. He has written to me and I have passed his letters on to the Minister. He points out that article 39 of the treaty of Rome says that the objective of the common agricultural policy is to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, in particular by increasing the individual earnings of those engaged in agriculture. What hope can the Minister give Mr. Kenny and other farmers in the Ribble valley that they will be able to make a living out of farming?

Mr. Brown: That is the core point. The main support systems for agriculture throughout the European Union are conditioned by the CAP. We want to be able to provide a future for United Kingdom farmers so that they get a return on the enormous number of hours that they put in and a return on their investment. We must reshape the CAP so that it moves away from an over-reliance on direct livestock subsidies and enables us to put support into rural communities, decoupled from production. We need support systems that will endure the coming pressures. We made a start on that in the latest negotiating round. If the hon. Gentleman wants to criticise me for not having done as much as I wanted, I accept that as fair criticism. I would like to have achieved more, but, as I

have explained in previous debates, four countries took the United Kingdom's reforming view and 11 countries opposed us. We did well to make a start.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I shall not criticise my right hon. Friend. Mr. Terrig Morgan of Ffrem Carreg y Llech, Treuddyn, who is a milk farmer; Mr. Idris Roberts of Pwll farm, Treuddyn, who is a beef and sheep meat farmer; and Mr. Clive Swan of Ffrith farm, Treuddyn, who must move out of beef and into organic farming, have real problems. I know that my right hon. Friend seeks to assist them and other farmers. Can he tell me which of his policies will make their problems a little easier?

Mr. Brown: I never lecture people on how to run their businesses. It is the Government's responsibility to set the framework of public sector support to enable businesses to flourish within it. We have to set the support lines rationally. Last week, I announced extra support for the organic sector and it has been widely welcomed.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): In the spirit of constructive proposals, I am concerned about the role of the banks in relation to the pig industry. Economists talk about the hog cycle. We are now at the bottom of the hog cycle, which is at a very depressed level. The banks are being accommodating to pig producers at the moment, partly because the stock, if it were to be sold, would be valueless. However, it is possible that when the cycle begins to move up, as it will, the banks will foreclose. I invite the Minister to take the initiative and try to persuade the banks not to foreclose. If they do, they will simply accentuate the peak of the hog cycle and make the situation worse.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman has raised a very important point. I have met the heads of the agricultural divisions of most of the main high street banks and most specialist banking institutions. There is one important exception, but I am having a meeting there next week. I find it easier to meet banks individually rather than collectively because discussions are more candid. At each meeting, we have taken a hard look at the issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised and I have made my representation that it is important to take account of the whole cycle. As prices rise in some sectors and producers return to profitability, debts will have to be repaid, not least to the suppliers of feedstuffs. I shall continue to make these points. I should say that the response from the banking community has been very constructive.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): Will the Minister address the problem of unfair competition? How can our pig industry compete with cheaper imports which are not subject to our animal welfare regulations? What can he do, especially at a time of European over-production, to create the fair and level playing field that we all seek?

Mr. Brown: Let me set out my analysis of the problems before making some specific comments about the pig sector. I recognise that of all the livestock sectors, the one that is most deeply in crisis and which has been through the most difficult time is the pigmeat sector. I want to do what I legally can to help, and I have some proposals in my speech. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I make my analysis in order.

First, I shall deal with the external factors to which Governments have a duty to respond. We cannot directly shape them. The loss of key world markets and, in particular, the impact for the United Kingdom beef sector of the continuing ban on exports are significant factors in the present difficulties. There are also difficult terms of trade in European Union and world markets, and for some sectors—such as sheep finishers—weather and farming conditions have posed additional difficulties. However, we also have to recognise that the difficulties reflect in part structural surpluses on the market, which have highlighted the effects in some sectors of the normal production cycles. Although those issues are notoriously difficult in the livestock sector, there can be no solution which leaves supply in excess of demand.

The Government have taken a series of steps—I absolutely reject the charge of complacency—within the constraints posed by the common agricultural policy to address the difficulties faced by the livestock sector. Our policy is underpinned by three key principles. First, where short-term financial help has been needed, we have given it, but in a form not likely to stimulate further over-supply; secondly, wherever possible we have taken steps to champion and underpin the undisputed quality of British produce; and, thirdly, where we could reasonably make trading terms easier, we have done so.

We have provided financial help, using the mechanisms at our disposal to offer special aid to the livestock sector in January 1998 and again in November 1998, to a total of £200 million for the beef, sheep, dairy and hill sectors. In individual sectors, we have eased the conditions of trade by removing the obstacles to exporting whole sheep carcases to France, and we have supported and actively pursued the European Commission in its action to underpin the pigmeat market. I shall say more about that in a moment.

We succeeded, where the Opposition failed, in securing political agreement among our European Union partners—first, to the export certified herds scheme for Northern Ireland, and then to the date-based export scheme. This paves the way for the resumption of beef exports from the UK.

We have responded to market developments. In February, recognising the continuing difficult conditions faced in the dairy sector, we extended to the end of July 1999 the calf processing aid scheme. That controversial decision was welcomed by the dairy sector and is worth some £9 million to the industry. In answer to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), I cannot hold out the prospect of it being further extended.

We have acted on an EU decision allowing us to make early payment of some £100 million in EU subsidy to beef producers—a step which I know helped to ease the cash flow difficulties suffered by many. We have championed the quality of UK products, bringing together all the sectors of the food chain with a view to ensuring that UK producers secure the premium that they deserve for their products, and securing valuable agreements from the British Retail Consortium on the labelling of meat and the sourcing of pigmeat.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): With regard to the date-based export scheme, my understanding is that only three out of 12 abattoirs have shown an

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

interest in becoming dedicated abattoirs and not one of those is in Wales. What steps are the Government taking to ensure the adequacy of the provision in due course?

Mr. Brown: The scheme will of course be driven by market judgments. We have made a good start. The Meat and Livestock Commission inspected three abattoirs last week—one in England, one in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. I accept that there is not one in Wales, but as exports resume and the export market grows, I am sure that others will become interested, and we stand ready to facilitate their entry into the date-based export scheme. Some in the industry, however, are stepping back and waiting to see how the markets develop before making a decision. It is important for us to make a start and we are proceeding on our timetable. The key hurdle was to achieve the political agreement to make a start and we did that last November.

The December Council of Ministers agreed to reform the agrimonetary regime, which this year is worth some £95 million to UK recipients of CAP livestock direct payments in measures to smooth the transition to the single currency. Over its lifetime, depending on currency movements, it might be worth some £140 million to the industry. The agreement was quite hard to achieve and we should be proud of achieving a 100 per cent. deal for the United Kingdom, as we could hardly do better.

In March, we secured an additional 100,000 head in beef special premium rights for the UK, to apply from 2000 and to remain as long as restrictions on export from the UK beef market persist. The UK beef industry identified that as a priority when we consulted it on the Agenda 2000 proposals. We made it a negotiating priority and achieved it.

I have looked hard at the burden of costs on the industry. I have no quarrel with the hon. Member for South Suffolk for raising the issue. My predecessor ensured that the Government met the costs in 1998-99 of Meat Hygiene Service enforcement of controls on specified risk material from cattle and sheep at a value to the industry of £35 million, and bore the start-up and first-year running costs of the new cattle tracing system—a system underpinning key guarantees on the quality of British products—at a value to the beef and sheep industry of a further £35 million.

We have successfully lobbied the Commission—in recognition of exceptional weakness in the sheep sector—to open tenders for private storage aid in the UK on two occasions during the 1998 marketing year. This provided support to the UK market for lamb to the extent of about £3 million.

We have committed £1.85 million in grant aid over three years to the assured British meat scheme—an initiative to drive through new baseline standards in the red meat sector, from farm to plate. I attach enormous importance to that and I invite the hon. Member for South Suffolk to join me in supporting the farm assured schemes. It is not a political matter. The hon. Member called for clear labelling to enable consumers to identify produce that is UK-sourced. The labelling scheme launched by the Meat and Livestock Commission does exactly that. This is not a party political point; we should be able to join in support of the MLC's work.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): I agree with the Minister on the farm assured scheme. The problem in the livestock industry is that prices are still depressed and farm incomes are low. The Minister will visit the Farmers Union of Wales shortly. The farm management survey shows that some categories of beef and sheep farms in Wales earned only £48 last year. My calculations for some of the upland farms show that earnings are £2.60 an hour, £1 lower than the national minimum wage. What will he tell them about how market prices will improve so that their incomes improve?

Mr. Brown: The one thing that I will not do is make some broad, confident political statement and go away hoping that no one remembers it. These are difficult times. The only way through is for the Government to conduct our affairs with candour and to enter into honest and depoliticised discussions with the industry on how best to get through these difficult times. The future of the sheep sector will involve the reshaping of the hill livestock compensatory allowance, about which I will have more to say later. In any event, an announcement on the consultation will be made tomorrow, giving details of the scheme. I know that that will be of enormous interest to the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Beyond that, I hope to restructure the support system, within the levers that are open to me following the Berlin summit, to give a clear shape to the support system for sheep producers. Within that, they can shape their businesses accordingly. I have other initiatives on fighting our corner in the marketplace. Since becoming Minister, I have tried to draw retailers, processors and farmers together, and tried to get them to have a constructive interest in each other's economic liability. They must not take an unfair advantage of the spot market—something that has characterised the debate.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): The Minister is honest and straightforward enough not for a moment to deny that agriculture in this country has been in rather profound recession. Is it not politically perverse for any Government dealing with any industry in such a recession to be loading charges on to it? The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) was right in saying that these additional charges are at the behest of the Government, who can wave them in, suspend them or take them away. Would it not be sensible at this stage—given the scale of recession in agriculture and the collapse of incomes to which my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) referred—to put all this on hold until the industry has a chance to recover?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman makes his point persuasively, and I intend directly to address the question of charges later in my speech.

I wish to set out what the Government have done to dismiss the charge of complacency. It is reasonable for hon. Members on both sides of the House to make suggestions, which I will take constructively. If I can respond to them, I will. However, it is not fair to say that because things are difficult, the Government must be at fault and must be complacent. Whatever we are, we are not complacent.

I have spent a great deal of time and energy dealing with the different policy strands of the issue. I have been as candid as possible, not just with this House—as I am under an obligation to be—but with the farmers. Those meetings have not always been easy. People are looking for certainty, but I am not always able to provide that. If I could reshape the CAP on my own, it would look different from what emerged after Berlin; it would even look different from what emerged after Brussels.

We have secured an EU regulation that authorises the sale of UK intervention beef to the British armed forces, a point raised by the hon. Member for South Suffolk. The measure enables virtually all the beef supplied to the armed forces in the UK to be British. The same is true of fresh pork. I am doing what I can to persuade other public authorities to buy British, but they are under constraints in exactly the same way as the private sector in terms of competitive tendering and value for money. These constraints were not put on them by this Government.

We have moved to implement the EU beef labelling scheme, which requires retailers to prove their claims about the source of British beef. This enables consumers easily to identify and purchase British beef—a wise buy, as it is among the safest in the world.

Tomorrow, I will be announcing a further step in the major consultation which I launched in January to capture the industry's views on Agenda 2000. That consultation was widely welcomed by the industry as a new and valuable departure and one which, for our part, helped to shape our negotiating position in Brussels to good effect. Following Berlin, there will be further consultations on the three areas where there is discretion for me.

The charge in the Opposition motion is that Labour is not the party of the countryside. The Government are fully committed to ensuring that those who live in rural communities thrive. We have launched, with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, a comprehensive consultation on the elements for a rural White Paper. It covers the full range of activities and issues that are key to rural areas, including those directly related to agriculture.

In the many open meetings that I have attended in rural areas on the White Paper, the initiative has been well received. The discussions have covered issues such as public transport, social housing, the planning regime for village communities and, above all, the employment base of rural communities and small villages. What has been said overwhelmingly is that those who live in villages want them to be working communities with a balance of age ranges and employment opportunities.

There has been great interest in the potential of the rural development pillar—a new pillar of the European Union's Agenda 2000 package. I hope that that can be shaped by the UK Government. It is one of the issues that will be involved in the consultation that I am launching tomorrow to help achieve the rural objectives.

Mr. Yeo: The Minister referred to the consultation document on the White Paper. How many references are there to agriculture on the first one-page summary of that consultation document?

Mr. Brown: The purpose of the White Paper is to stimulate discussion across all of the areas confronting a rural community. Its value cannot be quantified by judging how many times planning is mentioned and how many times agriculture is mentioned. It is not that sort of exercise. We are trying to take an overarching approach, drawing all the threads in the policy debate together. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Suffolk means well, but I caution him against trying to quantify the matter in that simplistic and literal way. It does not help to inform the debate. There is no doubt that the economies of rural communities are shaped, at least in part, by the functioning of agriculture. We do not need to persuade each other of the importance of that.

The motion condemns the Government's response to the deepening crisis in pig farming. I have acknowledged that the sector is in crisis, and I am under no illusions about the difficulties. The slight improvement in the market recently does not mean that the problems are over.

There are three main factors behind the market weakness: first, the operation of the normal economic cycles, which are a feature of the pig sector in the UK and the EU; secondly, the degree of over-optimism two years ago among producers about the likely extent of demand, either domestically or for export; and, thirdly, against this background, UK pig producers have been hard hit by the loss of key overseas markets and the re-emergence of some producers—particularly in the Netherlands—which had previously been out of the European market because they had been the victims of classical swine fever.

In short, the market has been severely affected by over-supply, and the sole long-term solution lies with bringing supply and demand into better balance. I reject the charge of complacency. Since becoming Minister, I have worked with the industry to find ways in which it can iron out the sharper extremes of the variations in market returns, which are a feature of the notoriously volatile economic cycles which affect the sector.

We have identified solutions in several areas. First, we can maximise the use of EU instruments available to us to smooth the markets. We have successfully urged the European Commission to make judicious use of export refunds and aids to private storage to provide a boost for the market. As recently as 15 February, the rates of export refunds on certain processed pigmeat products exported to Russia were increased by up to 80 per cent., helping commercial exports to remain at buoyant levels.

I have worked hard with all parts of the food chain to secure for the UK's domestic industry the premium that it deserves for the high welfare standards that it observes. It is unfair for the hon. Member for South Suffolk to try to unpick the agreement that I made with the British Retail Consortium at Christmas. The industry is a producer of high quality pigmeat. It does not use meat and bone-meal feed and has high animal welfare and ethical standards. We should boast about that.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): The Minister will be aware of a proposition that was put to his Ministry some time ago now to see whether there was some way in which the offal from pigs could be processed in dedicated plants so that that material could be given a value and perhaps sold to the poultry industry. The whole industry was united in supporting that idea and it would have

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

helped the economics of the industry. The idea seems to have died a death. Can the Minister tell us where it has gone?

Mr. Brown: The idea has not died a death. I am interested in it and gave the hon. Gentleman an assurance that I would see whether it could be adopted. My Department is considering with the Meat and Livestock Commission whether it can put together a complete industry case that deals with the difficult question of cross-contamination to submit to the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, to obtain its views on whether the idea is feasible to help the pig sector for which BSE is not a direct issue. The short answer to his point is that we are considering preparing a case, which would have to go before SEAC and advice would then be given to Ministers. I cannot undermine the public protection measures, so the core of the submission will be the industry's description of how the dangers of cross-contamination can be met with 100 per cent. safety. The idea is worthy of further examination. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the part he has played in the debates about a sector that is experiencing difficult times.

I have worked with the Meat and Livestock Commission and the National Farmers Union to secure recognition for their assurance schemes. I have taken part in a series of events with the chairman of the MLC, Don Curry, and others to promote the pig mark and other initiatives, and I say that my policy is having some success. UK pork prices are some 20 per cent. above the EU average, 25 per cent. higher than the Danish price and 40 per cent. higher than the Dutch price. That in part reflects the work that my Ministry and the MLC have put into obtaining that UK premium in the marketplace. I urge hon. Members to get behind me and the MLC and—instead of complaining and criticising—to win for the industry the premium that it should be able to command. That means buying UK. It should not be a political question, because we should all have the same objective.

For the future, I believe that the issue of the recognition of welfare standards will need to be considered in the wider context of the forthcoming negotiations when the World Trade Organisation discusses agricultural trade. We will have to insist that the issue is taken into account. I note the call that we should ban imports of products from third countries if we believe that they do not meet the standards that our producers observe. That is an important issue and the Commissioner will report to the Council of Ministers on one aspect of it in June. The way forward lies in devising a formula that observes international obligations and does not fuel pure protectionism under the guise of concern about health and welfare standards. There is no protectionist solution to the problem.

I am often asked about the relative production costs for UK producers compared with their European Union counterparts. The MLC, a statutory body funded by the industry, is well placed to advise on those issues. It recently completed a body of work on the topic and I offer the following commitment to the House. I intend to discuss that work with the MLC and to involve the industry in the discussions.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): What is the point of banning growth promoters and antibiotics on public health grounds in this country if we then permit imports of meat in which those growth promoters and antibiotics have been used?

Mr. Brown: Four veterinary interventions have been banned by the EU and there are alternatives that are not used in human medicines. The purpose of the ban was to prevent the consumption by EU citizens of quantities of those medicines. The argument is that such consumption is not prevented because of the imports. However, the levels consumed are dramatically reduced if EU produce does not include the promoters. It is not a public health issue but it is a trade issue. We have asked Commissioner Fischler to report to the Council of Ministers' June meeting on that trade point. It is a fair point for the hon. Gentleman to raise and, indeed, I raised it myself when I spoke for our country at the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): If there is no protectionist solution against the import of lower welfare standard products, could there be a labelling solution to let the consumers choose?

Mr. Brown: All Ministers are under pressure on labelling schemes. I urge consumers to look for the assured British pork label, because they can then buy UK pork, ham or bacon reared to ethical standards and which has not been fed on meat and bone-meal feed. That is the product to choose in the supermarket, and we should tell that to our constituents and to retailers. Although most retailers are helping with the labelling scheme, there are exceptions. I shall talk to those retailers and urge them to take part in the scheme.

Mr. Drew: It appears that the Danes and the Dutch are investing heavily in all manner of means to raise their environmental and welfare standards to compete with the British.

Mr. Brown: I am not in the least bit surprised, because it is clear that is the route to achieving a premium in the marketplace. The work that the Ministry and the MLC have done seems to have achieved that, but I accept that it is fragile. The crisis is not yet over and I would be grateful for any help from hon. Members, as well as from my hon. Friends.

Mr. Luff: The right hon. Gentleman is a fair man and he will probably not be surprised that I am disappointed that he has made no reference so far to the severe criticisms by the Select Committee on Agriculture of the response by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Committee's report on the pig industry. I am especially disappointed that he has made no reference to level playing field issues, which are very important. In an earlier intervention, I mentioned the problem of French subsidies for the pig industry, which the Minister appeared to think were not happening. What steps is he taking to reassure himself that the heavily reported subsidies being paid by the French Government to the French pig industry are not happening and further disadvantaging the UK pig industry?

Mr. Brown: I am trying to gather information through the usual route of the agricultural attachés at the embassy in Paris. If we find any evidence of illegal subsidies,

we will protest at once to the Commission. If the hon. gentleman has any evidence to supply—perhaps a description of the schemes that he believes are under way—I will examine it carefully. Nobody should doubt that it is the UK's view that no extra subsidies should be paid by individual nation states to try to get their industries through a crisis, to the disbenefit of other nations' pig industries. That would not be fair in what is supposed to be a single market. There should be no extra intervention by individual nation states.

I welcomed the good and thorough report of the Select Committee on Agriculture. Naturally, I do not accept its criticisms, particularly the charges of complacency directed at my Ministry. I do not accept that I am responsible to Parliament for the work of the Meat and Livestock Commission. The point is technical, but it is a non-governmental body. I have departmental responsibility for the area in which it works, but it would not wish me to give it instructions or tell Parliament what I thought it should do. The MLC is an industry group, funded by a levy from producers, not from the taxpayer.

Mr. Luff: I am afraid that I cannot agree with the Minister. When we reported on floods and coastal defence, we had a helpful response from the Environment Agency. The Meat and Livestock Commission should have provided a response to our report, and the Ministry should have made sure that such a response was forthcoming. He was seriously remiss in not ensuring that that happened.

Mr. Brown: I do not wish to disagree across the Floor of the House with the Chairman of the Select Committee. I seek a constructive working relationship with the Committee, and many of the points raised in its report are points of detail, not principle. In fact, we all share the point of principle: we all want to get the industry through difficult times caused, at least in part, by factors beyond the direct control of the UK Government. There is an EU-wide surplus, and that is difficult to deal with. I should like Ministers to sit down with members of the Select Committee to work through the criticisms to try to find common ground and to set out why we do not agree in some areas.

We are on target towards the lifting of the beef ban. We are on timetable.

Mr. Yeo *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman laughs. I should have thought that he should be a little more restrained, given the way in which the problem came about in the first place. It has cost our country £4.6 billion, and 39 of our citizens have died.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): Forty.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend tells me the number is now 40. I am sorry to hear that, but there will be more to come. BSE is a serious matter.

That is the background to consideration within the European Union. Ministers from other countries quite naturally want to protect their citizens and to be satisfied that we are doing all we should to protect ours. Their examinations have been incredibly rigorous, and it is a tribute to those working in public protection that we are passing those examinations.

Mr. Gill: Does the Minister recognise that many problems associated with BSE arose because his party, when in opposition, was constantly telling the then Government to prove that beef was safe? The Minister knows that no scientist in the world worth his salt will give such an assurance. His party undermined the industry time after time when it was in opposition.

Mr. Brown: No, no, no. I cannot accept that. The hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), actually takes the opposite position, saying that beef is safe, whether it is or is not. That is the approach that the hon. Gentleman's party has adopted on the beef on the bone ban. If the chief medical officer says that there is a risk, no matter how small, I must accept what he says. There is no point in asking for the CMO's professional advice, then rejecting it because I want to assert a political view.

Anyone who pauses for a moment will realise what impact such action would have on the marketplace. It would be disastrous. Confidence in our public safety regime is of paramount importance to the health of the domestic beef market. People have confidence in the current public protection measures, and that confidence is justified. I will do nothing to jeopardise it, either on grounds of public health or on grounds of market confidence.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Brown: I ought to get on because I am conscious that others wish to speak. I have been generous in giving way and should perhaps move on.

I have been asked about Milk Marque. The motion has something to say about it, but I am afraid that is more than I can do. I have received representations from producer organisations, and I take them very seriously. However, the report rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who is also considering representations, and it would be quite improper of me to speculate about it.

I hope that the House will forgive me for moving on over the range of matters I have been asked about.

Mr. Paterson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Brown: I watched on television in my Department as the hon. Gentleman spoke in the earlier road haulage debate, so I should be only too happy to give way to him.

Mr. Paterson: The Minister is most generous, so I shall be brief. The Meat Hygiene Service appears to be out of control. Because it is self-regulating, the more it regulates, the more people it can employ and the more income it can demand from the abattoir industry. What measures will the Minister take to bring the service back under control and to reduce the burden on UK abattoirs?

Mr. Brown: I am satisfied that control of that next steps agency is perfectly proper. Indeed, I pay tribute to

[Mr. Brown]

the senior management who have, uniquely, pulled it together from a local authority base to work as a unified body, which was not easy.

The hon. Gentleman asked about costs: I have touched on regulatory burdens on the industry, and I recognise deep concerns about the prospect of increased charges for veterinary inspections in abattoirs. Those costs would arise from a possible increase in meat hygiene inspection costs and from the proposal to pass to the industry charges for the enforcement of the rules requiring removal of specified risk material for cattle and sheep. I have listened carefully to all that the industry has said on that point, and to the concern that increases of the scale proposed would cause severe difficulties for many abattoirs and for the primary producers who might have to share the burden.

The Government remain of the view that it is, in principle, right to recover those costs from the industry. Like other member states, we are obliged by EU legislation to recover the costs of meat hygiene inspections, including the veterinary element. In dealing with those charges, we do not intend to put smaller operations—particularly those that specialise in high-quality product—out of business.

I am therefore announcing today a complete deferral for this financial year of specified risk material inspection costs, amounting to £20 million. For this year, the burden will be borne by the Government, not passed on to the industry.

I have a further announcement: the Government will undertake a further close examination of the dynamics of the slaughtering sector, of the impact of all the charges on abattoirs and on producers. We shall also examine European Union legislation and the way in which inspections are carried out to ensure that when charges are set, the costs are as low as possible, consistent with public safety, and with honouring our obligations under EU law. My aim is that the study should be completed quickly, and I intend to take a close interest in its conclusions.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): I am extremely grateful for the announcement made by my right hon. Friend. It will be warmly welcomed by small slaughter operators throughout the country—not least by my local operator, John Coles, and butchers in Exeter, including my own, whom he provides with excellent meat from Piper's farm. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the impact assessment that he has announced will examine the particular difficulties faced by small craft operators and the special role that they play in terms of quality and local, transparent production and marketing of high-quality food?

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming the announcement. It is as much as I can do during the next financial year. I am constrained by law from doing more. I will ensure that all the points that he has made and the concerns to which he has alluded are put before the review. I take that review seriously and intend to take a close personal interest in it.

I conclude by considering the challenges that the sector will face during the next few years—that is at the heart of the debate. We face a world in which transport developments are bringing markets and suppliers closer together, and developing consumer tastes are widening potential product ranges and ensuring that people understand more than ever about the food that they eat. It is a world in which the pressures—from the formal procedures of the World Trade Organisation and from commercial practices—to liberalise markets and to compete freely and keenly will become ever stronger. It is a world in which the EU's ambitions for enlargement offer the prospects of enormous change, forcing us to rethink both the basis of EU agricultural support, and to meet the challenge of a larger pool of consumers keen to enter EU markets. Against that background, UK agriculture faces enormous changes and challenges—challenges that have already started to be met through the reshaping of agricultural policy contained in Agenda 2000 and through the options open to the UK to implement that change.

My task, as I hope I have set out this evening, is to help UK agriculture face those issues and for Government and industry—from producers to processors and retailers—to work co-operatively for enduring solutions. I ask the House to contrast the Government's constructive approach with the "impossibilist" policies of the Opposition, and to support the Government's amendment.

8.41 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): My contribution will be brief; time is getting on and other Members want to speak.

I begin by responding to the important and significant statement made by the Minister in the final part of his speech. Liberal Democrats give that statement a warm welcome. It is a correct decision which will help and bolster the section of the industry that includes abattoirs and primary producers. They are already suffering and, without being churlish, I echo the comment, "Too late," made from the Opposition Benches while the Minister was speaking. However, as a result of his statement, some small-scale abattoirs—of the sort with which all Members have constituency or regional contacts—which are in financial difficulty may now be able to claw themselves out of that difficulty over a period.

Having made the decision, I hope that in his discussions with banks, the Minister will point out that the responsibility for taking a lenient, indulgent and supportive attitude lies with the banks, because what might seem like a closure situation next week may not be one in 12 months' time. The bankers must have as steady a nerve as those operating the facilities. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will stress that point to the bankers and, with that caveat, I welcome what he said about the deferral for one year.

In relation to right hon. Gentleman's assessment, I make one suggestion. With all due respect, as he has only just made the statement, there has obviously been no opportunity to discuss the matter with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Agriculture, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff). However, in relation to the Food Standards Agency, surely we have broken new ground in the workings of the House, because a Select Committee is considering what is proposed in advance of legislation. That is a healthy and sensible development.

I do not doubt that the Chairman of the Select Committee and his colleagues already have a full in-tray. However, I wonder whether the assessment to which the

Minister referred—the nature of the abattoir industry and its relationship to other parts of the food cycle, and so on—might not be better carried out by the Select Committee. We do not necessarily want only a Government-sponsored and controlled assessment and consultation process; we might want an all-party consultation process driven by the Chairman of the Select Committee, who would then report to the Government in due course. We cannot make decisions about that tonight; the matter is well beyond the remit—*[Interruption.]* Of course, it is up to the Committee, but it is also up to the Government to give it a fair wind, if they are so minded. I hope that the matter will be considered after tonight's statement; it would be a useful way forward.

Time is passing and I intend being brief. I turn to the wider issue of the reform of the common agricultural policy—and all that. The Minister was characteristically straightforward when he said that the outcome of the Agriculture Council—never mind the outcome at Berlin—was not as he would have wanted. I doubt whether it was what most Members of the House would have wanted.

The big political worry is that the outcome of those discussions can be regarded only as an interim settlement, and that the issue will have be revisited yet again if the European Union is to remain true to the broader political agenda of enlargement. The EU must be aware that there is no chance of practical enlargement into central and eastern Europe, even under the modified proposals agreed after the Berlin summit. The CAP will have to be reopened if Europe is to achieve any realisation of its broader ambition—a legitimate ambition, which, like all parties, we strongly support—to widen the frontiers of Europe and the membership of the EU itself.

Domestically, the Minister spoke of his wish for the establishment of more support systems for rural development in the wider sense, and in that respect the settlement achieved at the Agriculture Council and the Berlin summit is a great disappointment. We know that more finance is potentially available for investment in rural development projects and programmes, agri-environment schemes, conservation, environmentally skewed schemes and so on; unfortunately, we are not to have access to those funds because of the unsatisfactory nature of the financial arrangements arrived at in the recent discussions. I hope that the Minister will continue to exert pressure on that subject. In particular, I hope that he will urge the Chancellor, who is the key person in this respect, to continue to press his opposite numbers at European level, because the current arrangements, which were railroaded through by the French late at night, are far from satisfactory and go against what Europe itself has said that it wants to achieve.

If we want greater emphasis to be placed on the environment, conservation and husbandry of the countryside, the only way to deliver that is to have people in the countryside who understand it, care for it and have experience of it. In most cases, given the structure of UK farming, that means maintaining the basic building block—the UK family farm. However, until additional money becomes available for that sort of rural investment, those family farms will either continue to amalgamate at the current rate or go out of business completely. Either way, we end up with a more denuded countryside, which is precisely the opposite of what Europe says it wants to achieve.

That reflects the profoundly unsatisfactory state in which the discussions of the CAP were left. Although those discussions cause uncertainty in the agricultural community in this country, as in every other EU member state, we have to be honest with our farming sector and say that Pandora's box will have to be reopened sooner rather than later, if the broader aims of European enlargement and more enlightened and more economically deliverable conservation of the UK environment and countryside are to be achieved.

I agree with a great deal of what the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) said—it would be hard not to agree with him, because, from our experience of listening to rural Britain, we know that he was telling us the facts. However, the Conservatives' motion contains a hint that all the problems began at the stroke of midnight on 2 May 1997. They did not. The party that was continuously in office for the previous 18 years cannot tell us with any more persuasiveness than they bring to health matters that the set of rural policy levers that are thrown one year have an immediate impact the next. Both health policy and rural policy have longevity—they roll on and on. Therefore, much as I agree with many of the hon. Gentleman's points, the great weakness of the Conservatives' case is that history did not begin only two years ago; it dates back much further than that, and their case is weakened by their unwillingness to acknowledge that.

I have two further points to make in respect of Europe. The crisis in the pig industry has already been described, so I shall not go over that again. The Government must be extremely proactive about the labelling issue. The European labelling directive is rather like Billy Bunter's postal order: it is in the post, but we will believe it when we see it. We will wait a very long time if we wait for Europe. Can the Government take some primary legislative initiative here and now, rather than waiting for Godot in Brussels to deliver something in terms of labelling?

Mr. Nick Brown: As to pig products, the crucial point is the Meat and Livestock Commission's farm-assured labels. That system is in place now and does not require legislation. As political advocates, we must simply get behind the system and encourage people to consume products where they see those labels. It is as straightforward as that.

Mr. Kennedy: Politics is a mixture of carrot and stick. I was at the launch when the Minister correctly gave his and the Government's full support to the MLC initiative. Encouragement, advocacy, persuasion and advertising have their place, but a degree of stick may also be required to convince some of the characters with whom we deal in this business. I am not sure that a degree of legislative initiative on the Government's part would be misplaced. They might not have to deliver such legislation: the threat might concentrate several minds that need to be focused in a commercial sense.

Allied to that, we have heard talk of a level playing field in Europe. That is undoubtedly a legitimate point. However, I always feel that, although there is a level playing field—whether it is in the oil industry in my

[Mr. Kennedy]

constituency or in agriculture in the context of this debate—it seems to have better drainage in some parts of Europe compared with others.

Mr. Livsey: That's a good one.

Mr. Kennedy: If my hon. Friend uses it, he must let me know and I will send him the invoice.

If there is legitimate evidence—it is mightily difficult to find in every case—we should pursue the guilty party hard.

The dog that does not bark in terms of the Conservative motion tonight is economic and monetary union. We know that the strength of the pound is a real problem. There is no doubt about that. We know also that markets in the far east, Russia and elsewhere have collapsed, particularly for the pig industry, and that various sectors of agriculture are in a state of over-supply.

However, if we talk not just to farming industry leaders but to local farmers, we find a growing realisation among a pretty canny, sceptical section of the population that Britain would be better off in, or committed to, economic and monetary union, rather than completely hostile to and distanced from it. As the Government well know, the Liberal Democrats would like them to be more enthusiastic and unambiguous about EMU as a political principle as well as a policy process.

I do not wish to wade into the well-advertised public grief of the Conservatives in this area, but it is quite astonishing that their motion in this agriculture debate does not address, in one way or the other, the issue of monetary union, its impact on United Kingdom agriculture and our position relative to the rest of the European Union. For obvious reasons, the silence from the Conservatives tonight is breathtaking.

Mr. Gill *rose—*

Mr. Kennedy: Of course I will give way. I enjoyed my recent visit to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, when I lunched with my great friend Sir Julian Critchley. I could never accuse the hon. Gentleman of not being consistent when it comes to EMU.

Mr. Gill: I have never doubted the hon. Gentleman's political credentials. The problem with the pound is not that it is strong—the hon. Gentleman need only consider the parity that it enjoys with the United States dollar—but that other European countries have driven down their currencies in an attempt to hit the convergence criteria. That is the reality of the situation, and the hon. Gentleman knows it.

Mr. Kennedy: Although I am aware that we are getting into a debate, largely at my behest, about EMU, rather than the subject that we should be discussing, I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman's intervention. The inherent early weakness in the euro is largely due to the fact that sterling has not joined it. If sterling had been one of the building blocks or if the UK had been committed to the euro, with an appropriate entry date following a referendum, confidence in the euro would be stronger than it is in these initial stages. It is a question of whether the glass is half-empty or half-full, but I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's general view on that issue.

Many other issues are detailed in the motion, but I shall deal with only two or three. I shall make a constructive suggestion, which I have raised with the Government before. Many hon. Members from all parties find that many of our farmers are coming to us with small-scale problems as well as the broader issues that they face. Action to solve those smaller problems is within the Government's remit and, I hope, the remit of the devolutionary settlement in Wales and Scotland.

Those problems include integrated control and administration system forms, the clawbacks that are imposed from time to time and the sometimes rather draconian interpretation of rules and regulations by regional officers. In my experience at a local level, nine times out of 10, a bit of common sense and good will would iron out the problem. That common sense is not being applied sufficiently well.

In almost every other sector of public life, whatever class of citizen is involved, there is some provision for an independent right of appeal. If one is not happy with the Child Support Agency or the Benefits Agency, one can go to an independent arbitrator or assessor. It is extraordinary that there is nothing of that sort for farmers. All they can do is write to their Member of Parliament. What do we do? We write to the Minister. The Minister's office passes the letter on to the district office that made the decision or offered the advice. In most cases, that office sends a letter back to the Minister saying, "Yes, we were right." The Minister writes back to the MP saying, "All is well. Sorry that I can't help."

Farmers should have the right to go through an independent arbitration mechanism in cases where decisions are made or advice given. A sum of £2,000 or £3,000 may not be a lot of money, but, given the collapse in incomes that farmers are experiencing, it is the difference between being viable or going bust. We strongly support such a mechanism, and I want the Government to take that on board.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): The Minister will know that I have written to him two or three times in recent months about similar cases. One involved a farmer who had his fields re-measured after four or five years. He found that there were modest changes—some fields were a little larger and some were a little smaller, but by less than a hectare in most cases. There was no suggestion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should be making an intervention, not telling a tale.

Mr. Breed: Farmers have tried to demonstrate that they are not form-fillers. They have made some odd mistakes, but it is inequitable that they can be penalised for modest over-claims that were made years before but can go back only one year when they have under-claimed.

Mr. Kennedy: I agree with my hon. Friend's point and, to paraphrase you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the tale that he has told.

Mr. Nick Brown: I was slightly stunned by the hon. Gentleman's description of the way in which we respond

to letters from hon. Members. I do not merely ask the regional office to justify its action, and then sling the answer back to the hon. Member. I have taken a good look at some of the hard cases brought to my attention by hon. Members. The problem is not that a kind-hearted person would not exercise discretion, but that we have no discretion. The rules of European Union schemes are incredibly rigid, to avoid abuse not only in the United Kingdom but throughout the EU. If we had discretion, we would use it, but we do not.

Mr. Kennedy: I do not doubt the Minister's account, as he sees it. Having dealt, like many of my colleagues, with a succession of Agriculture Ministers of both political parties over the years, I can only reflect on the fact that rigidity appears to have taken on a new realism under this Administration in terms of their interpretation of some of the schemes. Without invoking the principle of subsidiarity, I wonder whether there is not a little more that can creatively be done to advise people in advance, before the mistake is logged and entered, so that the clawback or the reference backwards does not have to be invoked. *[Interruption.]* I hear the bell tolling; I shall take that as my cue to conclude.

I conclude by saying that I hope that we get a decision on Milk Marque from the Department of Trade and Industry, sooner rather than later. I hope that the decision will maintain Milk Marque's position in the processing sector. We do not want it to be dismantled or dismembered on a regional basis, as that would be catastrophic for various reasons. I speak for my colleagues when I say that, as I hope that I do on the many other issues on which we have touched this evening—but one never knows in the Liberal Democrats. Having said that, through gritted teeth we shall probably have to vote for the Conservative motion.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Front-Bench exchanges have taken 92 minutes, and there are to be winding-up speeches. If hon. Members confined themselves to speeches of no longer than five minutes, it would be possible to have a reasonable spread of Back-Bench contributions.

9.1 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I shall take careful note of your request, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This is obviously well-travelled terrain. Given the time constraints, it is difficult to cover a motion of such length in much detail. However, it is useful to put on record the fact that Labour Members who live in rural areas genuinely understand the problems that farmers are experiencing. Many of us have farmers as friends, and we know that they are still facing dire problems in terms of their incomes. Small farmers in particular are struggling to make ends meet. I feel particularly for the tenant farmers in my area—those on the county farm estates which could be described as the poorer end of farming, hill farms notwithstanding.

There is so much that could and should be said, but we cannot proceed without mentioning bovine spongiform encephalopathy, a problem that is writ large. I know that the Opposition try to forget or to lay the blame elsewhere, as they tried to do today, but it is their responsibility, and we shall keep reminding them of that fact.

One point that is worth bearing in mind, and which was raised today at Prime Minister's questions by an Opposition Member, is the allegation that we are going slow in trying to get our beef exported to Europe. I remind the Opposition that the ban on tallow was removed while they were in office, yet we have still to see tallow back on the export markets. That says something about the European Union as well as about our efforts, but let us not fool ourselves into thinking that it is easy to regain export markets. The inspection regime is laborious—perhaps too laborious—and we must be realistic about how long it will take us to put it in place.

Mention has been made of bovine tuberculosis. We could spend the rest of the debate talking about its implications. Coming as it does on the back of BSE, it has been an enormous psychological downer for many farmers—admittedly, it affects another part of the agricultural sector, but we cannot describe its implications as anything other than very sad. In Gloucestershire alone, something like 130 herds have been affected, which in turn has an enormous impact on dairying. We have to be realistic in dealing with that problem.

I make no apology for highlighting one part of the Opposition's motion. Although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry can say nothing and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was likewise circumspect, I can comment on Milk Marque. I feel that I can speak with some expertise and objectivity, having met representatives of Milk Marque regularly. Also, there is a Dairy Crest factory a mile away from where I live, so I know only too well about the conflicts and confrontation that have gone on.

We have been left with a dreadful mess. Anyone who pretends otherwise is being less than candid. We are faced with the 90 per cent. clearance of milk supply. There was only one way that the entire operation could go. The processors would not buy, thereby forcing down the price and leading to conflict between farmers. We have ended up with an unholy mess which I hope my right hon. Friend will sort out, but it will not be easy.

The Opposition motion calls for Milk Marque to be given the right to process. That makes me smile, as the Conservatives did not give it that right when they set up Milk Marque. Only recently has Milk Marque been able to take over Aeron Valley and subsequently plants in Somerset and Cornwall, which has allowed the processing capacity to open up. That has led to much more vicious conflict with the dairy processors. I hope that the problems can be resolved. They are not of our making; we inherited them.

We could talk about milk quotas and the legacy of the previous Administration. We must try our best to solve those problems. On other subjects, I am always surprised at the demand for caution with regard to genetically modified organisms. I heartily support that position, as hon. Members know. However, when it comes to beef on the bone, many people are prepared to set aside professional advice and medical opinion. That contrast should be emphasised more strongly.

We could talk in considerable detail about reform of the common agricultural policy. A start has been made, but no one pretends that that is the end of the story or that

[Mr. David Drew]

we have got everything that we wanted. As my right hon. Friend the Minister said, we are part of a smaller group of reformers, as opposed to those who pretended that they wanted reform but in reality wanted to keep the same structures in place. That is unacceptable and we must continue to oppose it. We must do so as a nation, not in party political terms.

On the wider rural debate that is mentioned in the motion, it is interesting to note that the Conservative party calls itself the party of the countryside, yet there are so many Labour Members who represent rural communities.

We are pleased with the Green Paper that the Government have issued, which will lead later in the year to the White Paper. We encourage consultation so that there is proper discourse on the future of rural Britain. I shall be holding such a discussion on Monday with my rural community council, involving not just the agricultural community but the entire rural community, to make sure that I can represent the community's point of view. All hon. Members would be well advised to do the same.

It is easy to try to score cheap political points, but we know the depth of the crisis and we know how many people are undergoing genuine travails. Agriculture must undergo change. Many of us in the House feel that there has been too much belief in the independence and isolationism of farmers, and not enough collaboration. We need to promote marketing schemes and consider ideas such as farmers markets, which are beginning to grow throughout the country. They provide a win-win situation, inasmuch as they can reduce transport costs and result in high-quality produce. That is what the consumer wants, and that is what the consumer is prepared to pay for.

9.10 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The crisis may be cyclical, but from the perspective of the uplands, it seems permanently installed. One might say, "Well, so what? Other jobs come along; agriculture always changes; there is always an exodus from agriculture", but I am afraid that it is different in the uplands. There are not an easy recourse, a fail-safe mechanism, a new industry or any sunrise jobs there. Investment is difficult; it does not flow readily. The region is remote and there is no availability of sites. There is poor transport, and there are poor levels of skills and—certainly in North Yorkshire—national park constraints. We understand the designation of areas of natural beauty, but they none the less make investment more difficult.

The average gross domestic product per capita in North Yorkshire is 79.5 per cent. of the European average. The area has the lowest wage rates in the region. In the uplands, the figure is 63 per cent.—so low that, if it were Liverpool, it would meet objective 1 criteria for European Union assistance. Agriculture provides 18 per cent. of employment in the North Yorkshire uplands and 35 per cent. in the two national parks. Subsidy accounts for the entire net farm income. Tourism adds perhaps 30 per cent., but both agriculture and tourism—and, I might add, care of the elderly, which is the unseen industry in much of the countryside—are low-wage, cyclical and seasonal. Off-farm income is absolutely crucial.

Half the farmers are more than 50 years old, half in the less-favoured areas have no family successor and two thirds have no formal qualifications.' What is more, demography is against the dales; the population is changing. There are fewer people under 40 years old and, relatively speaking, more elderly people in the dales. So we have a sparse and ageing population. In addition, a quarter of them have no access to a private car. What I have said of the Yorkshire dales would be true of uplands across the United Kingdom.

That is the context of the agricultural crisis. We are faced in the uplands not just with a crisis industry but a crisis of society. One might say, "So what? Ways of life change, people have no right to be able to preserve a way of life indefinitely." But let us remember the fragility and vulnerability of the environment that we keep saying we want to save. On the 50th anniversary of the national parks, perhaps the Minister will remember, when he looks at his White Paper and his reviews, that those national parks were set up to try to maintain something very precious to the nation. That very preciousness is under threat at the moment.

There is action that the Government can take; I want to try to be constructive. First, objective 5b areas will be replaced by objective 2 status and its rural strand. The Government have the task of designating the populations which will fall within that. I hope that they will designate the whole of the population that is currently covered by the 5b areas of the Yorkshire uplands as objective 2 rural strand status, so that we may secure a stream of support for that important rural development.

Secondly, I hope that the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning will ensure that the regional development agencies recognise the genuine needs of the countryside in their programmes, and not the sometimes more evident needs of the inner city, which I would not want to deny. Thirdly, in reviewing long-term l[illegible] government funding, will the Government take into account the needs of sparse and unskilled populations?

Although the situation in agriculture is desperate, there are things that the Government can do to help. There is no point in pretending that the Berlin agreement was anything other than a disaster. The Minister made an heroic effort in negotiating the deal, which he might not have thought was as good as he wanted, but which none the less just about held together. That has been undermined. It is ridiculous to say that it is a starting point for World Trade Organisation talks or enlargement. That is simply not sustainable.

Milk quotas have plunged into long-term uncertainty. I hope that the purdah attendant on local, regional and European elections will not mean that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has absolutely nothing to say about the milk issue for the foreseeable future. That would pile another uncertainty on top of an existing one. Farmers are getting 18p or 19p a litre and the net returns per cow are about £40 at the moment. That is simply not a sustainable livelihood.

Under the Berlin agreement, we have the new national envelopes. We need to know, as soon as possible, how they will be allocated and, in particular, how that will play within the new regional framework that is developing in the United Kingdom. The shift from headage payments to area payments is a complex business, but the Minister will want to make sure that there is no major disruption in the pattern of that support and that no one has a cliff edge off which they have to fall.

The importance of the beef export trade has been emphasised and we must start to think about how we move beyond the 30-month scheme with the measures that are in place and the agrimonetary compensation to which the Minister has referred. People in the pig industry are losing money. The road to bankruptcy used to be gambling, women or drink, but there is now a short-cut to it—raising pigs.

The Minister said something very important—*[Interruption.]* I should like him to pay attention to the point that I want to make. He said that the world trade round should take welfare standards into account and I want to be sure that that is Government policy, because it is an important statement. If welfare standards—as well as environmental standards and labour market conditions—were taken into account, the upcoming world trade round would be wholly different from previous ones. To what extent do the Government believe that the chemistry for this trade round is different from that which we have traditionally encountered?

I welcome the Minister's review of the various burdens on industry and I hope that he will conclude it rapidly. I will not, therefore, add my name to the telephone directory of my constituents who have specific complaints on that issue—they have been recited—but I ask him to consider one matter: the groundwater directive, which is causing serious difficulties in the uplands.

The directive concerns the disposal of sheep dip. The Environment Agency charges—the licence fee and the annual charge—are quite heavy. Such straws are small, but their cumulative effect is serious. I hope that the Minister will add that matter to his review and will perhaps consider veterinary inspections, which are now being applied to the export of live animals. I say to the Parliamentary Secretary that, whether people like that trade or not, it is economically important, given the state of the sheep industry, and it underpins what is left of the sector's buoyancy. Such measures may have a rationale in themselves, but their cumulative effect causes difficulties in these circumstances.

If the Government have to produce a financial fiche for their proposals and an environmental impact assessment, I should welcome a level playing field assessment, which would be of great assistance to us all. I hope that the Minister will consider what he can do practically. He said that he will review charges—I welcome that—and I hope that he will urge his colleagues involved in rural development and competition, and those in his own Department who are involved in the implementation of the Berlin agreement, to consult frankly and introduce new measures rapidly. This crisis is not one of the moment; it is beginning to unstitch the whole of rural society.

I know from my own experience that the problems of cities are evident, obvious and striking. Countryside problems are often hidden, unspoken and borne in a grim, personal way. However, they need attention just as badly. We have a resilient and independent society, but there is a real danger that it will soon be unable to cope any more.

9.18 pm

Mrs. Janet Dean (Burton): I greatly welcome the debate, although I am saddened that, when Conservative Members choose to debate agriculture, as they have on several occasions, they concentrate on blaming the Labour Government for all its ills. I can only imagine that they do so either to atone for the mistakes that they made in government or because they cannot quite believe that many Labour Members represent rural areas. My constituency has two National Farmers Union branches and a 5b area, and is probably unique because it also contains an urban area with objective 2 status, so structural funds are very important to it.

As I have said in the House previously, I am a farmer's daughter and I lived on a farm until I was 19. It is rich for Conservative Members to presume that Labour Members know nothing about rural matters. I find that quite offensive, especially as the Conservative Government were clearly to blame for the BSE crisis, which is still having a great impact on agriculture and on the agricultural problems that we face. They also did not do much for the rural community when they introduced bus deregulation.

I pay tribute to Ministers for what they have achieved. During the Minister's recent visit to Staffordshire, farmers welcomed his honest way of talking to them and addressing the issues and problems that they raised with him. They also welcome the consultations that the Government have instigated. During the two years I have been meeting farmers in my constituency and making representations to Ministers, many of the issues that have been raised with me have been addressed. Farmers raised the matter of agrimonetary compensation with many of us and Ministers listened.

Ministers acknowledge that the problems of British agriculture are great. I particularly welcome some of the announcements that have been made tonight, because they have addressed issues that have recently been raised with me by farmers in my constituency. The difficulties with small abattoirs are important, especially if we want to develop the farmers markets to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) referred.

I also welcome the Minister's statement that welfare standards will be considered during discussions at the World Trade Organisation. Farmers in my area want a level playing field with the rest of Europe. Welfare standards that apply in this country should be taken on board by the rest of Europe and by the World Trade Organisation. I welcome the fact that we are modifying the charges immediately for abattoirs, with deferment of the specified risk material costs, and that we are examining further the costs of abattoirs in this country compared with those in the rest of Europe. I particularly welcome the consideration of welfare standards with regard to pigmeat.

It is not always the Opposition who raise agricultural issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) secured an Adjournment debate on badgers and TB in Staffordshire. That is of particular concern in the northern parishes—the same northern parishes as form the objective 5b area in my constituency and adjoin the Staffordshire-Derbyshire border. There is concern about the dramatic increase in the number of farms whose herds have been affected. We want that problem to be addressed, and I hope that that area can in the future be one of the trial areas.

There are many problems in the rural communities that Labour Members represent. I believe that Ministers are aware of those problems and are trying to address them. As I said, I find it offensive when Conservative Members imply that those problems all began in May 1997.

9.24 pm

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): I welcome the Minister's statement on the meat hygiene expenses and the specified risk material costs. Clearly, any such statement has to be welcomed. I also welcome the opportunity to debate the whole farming issue and the crisis in the United Kingdom. The situation is especially critical in Northern Ireland, because of the greater emphasis that we place on farming. Farming is the largest industry in Northern Ireland, and we have many small farmers.

If I lived on the mainland I would agree entirely with the motion, but because parts of it do not apply to Northern Ireland my party will abstain in the vote. It would be too much for an Opposition party to support the Government amendment, given its talk of approving and of welcoming initiatives; but we appreciate what the Minister has done since taking office. He has visited Northern Ireland and met representatives of the industry there, and I think that when he talked to representatives of the pig industry he understood the difficulties of that industry for the first time.

As for beef, we are able to export it, but the loss of markets is causing us great difficulties, as is the high value of the pound. I understand that exports are now running at about 20 tonnes a week, as against 1,000 tonnes before the crisis. I know that there have been marketing initiatives, but I do not think that exports will reach their former level for some time. We look forward to the introduction of the date-based system, which will provide much more beef for export, and to the end of the ban on beef on the bone, which, I understand, provides cuts that are more attractive to the export industry. I note from a written answer that when Scotland has its Parliament it will be able to lift the ban, and I wonder what impact that will have on the rest of the United Kingdom.

Like the Minister, I am aware of the deep crisis in the pigmeat industry. Many pig farmers are heavily overdrawn; some are suffering from depression, and others are in despair. Although prices have increased somewhat, they are nowhere near high enough to meet running costs: indeed, I think that they are paying only for the meal fed to animals. We have a long way to go yet.

The amendment mentions Agenda 2000. We welcome the extra quota for Northern Ireland, although how it is to be distributed has yet to be decided. I hope that we will have some news about that soon. We also welcome the peace and reconciliation money that we have received. It represents quite a lot of income for Northern Ireland, and to an extent will compensate for the loss of objective 1 status.

One of our greatest problems in regard to farming overall is that we are in Europe, and must make and fight our case there. Because other nations have their own interests, progress is always difficult. Not very much progress has yet been made in reshaping the CAP, but there will never be proper scope for real farming, with proper profitability, until we completely reorganise the CAP movement.

We are under a time limit in the debate, and I shall not delay the House any longer, so that other hon. Members may have their say.

9.30 pm

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): I very much welcome the opportunity of speaking in the debate.

The problems in agriculture are profound, and it does no service to the industry to try to simplify its problems and to turn them into party political issues, as the Opposition motion attempts to do. We need a careful strategy that will take the industry through an extremely difficult time.

The strategy should not only take notice of the industry's rightful economic interests, but deal with some of the most topical political concerns of our time—including animal welfare, about which the public feel strongly; food safety and public health, about which the public feel very strongly; environmental issues, about which is there is huge concern; and scientific issues. Current scientific developments—such as those in genetically modified products—could transform agriculture and the way in which it is practised, about which there is great public concern, and on which the Conservative party has been in the forefront in opposition.

All those issues are of profound interest not only to the farming community, but to the wider public. It does no service to anyone to try to draw artificial divides between the two communities—rural and urban, and agriculture and consumers.

The debate has already dealt at great length with the price issue, which is already well known and has been well rehearsed. I very much welcome the measures that my right hon. Friend the Minister has both announced today and taken in the past year.

I should like, extremely briefly, to address a few issues, one of which is the distortions caused by the common agricultural policy—which is perhaps the only issue on which I share profound concern with my predecessor as hon. Member for Northampton, North.

Farm incomes are not related to prices, but are down to subsidies. I have spoken to farmers in the Northamptonshire area who gain half their income from subsidies—which is a measure not only of the distortions caused by the common agricultural policy, and the need to deal with those distortions, but of the effects that exchange rates have had on farm incomes.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Keeble: I shall not give way, as we are restrained by time. However, I am sure that I shall have many discussions with the hon. Gentleman on those issues.

The distortions also demonstrate the profound problems of reforming the common agricultural policy. Removing price supports from farmers will be extremely painful for them and will be difficult to effect. Although we all pay lip service to the results of removing price supports, there will be quite serious consequences for the farmers who lose that subsidy—which is the real issue, and which made it so difficult to make progress in Europe on Agenda 2000. Some of the other European Governments realised the impact that subsidy loss would have on farm incomes and felt the pressure from their farming community. It is a real tribute to the skill of our Minister that he was able to keep the debate going and to achieve some movement on an extremely difficult issue.

Although we all pay lip service also to the issue of a level playing field, achieving it is often much more difficult than we realise. The first issue on which we always say that we want a level playing field is animal welfare. I suspect that if some members of the public saw

some of the farming methods that are used, they would ask for higher animal welfare standards. Raising standards in farms abroad will be very difficult to achieve, as will keeping pace with public concerns about animal welfare.

The second issue is food safety. I give notice to my right hon. Friend the Minister that if he slackens provisions too far, I shall be down his throat. I welcome the measure on abattoirs that he has announced tonight, but if we slacken on food safety standards and what happens in the abattoirs, the consequences for public health will be great. I am not talking about BSE, because everybody talks about that. I have seen one of my children laid up in hospital with E. coli 0157, probably as a result of eating infected beef that I did not cook properly. Fillet steak does not come with a warning saying "cook until the juices run clear". I dread to think what the Conservatives would say if it did. With such difficult issues, we must ensure that we pay proper attention to public health, and drive up standards in abattoirs and in meat hygiene. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will not compromise on that, particularly with my hon. Friend the Minister of State sitting next to him.

My right hon. Friend has rightly avoided the short-termism that the Conservatives promoted in dealing with the crisis facing agriculture. He has provided targeted aid, but he has adopted a long-term strategy. It may be more difficult to convince the public of such a strategy, but it is undoubtedly right. The Conservatives have supported him in bringing some honesty to the debate about the future of agriculture. I hope that he will persist with his long-term policies, because they are in the interests of agriculture and of the general public, who look for high standards in all areas of agriculture.

9.37 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I shall not waste precious seconds giving the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) a lesson in how to cook steak, but I assure her that if she cooks it until the juices run clear, she will have a rotten steak. The idea is to seal it on the outside and to have nice, bloody juice inside. But enough of that.

The Minister talked about candour and honesty. I accept that he is a candid and honest man, and has been so with the farmers. However, his amendment is not so candid or honest, because it says that the Agenda 2000 negotiations will

"provide the livestock sector with stability and a secure future."

They manifestly will not.

I suspect that the agreement that the Minister negotiated on 11 March, after many late nights, was a good one. However, he did not reckon with the Prime Minister unpicking it and walking away with an agreement that, far from being a launching pad for something new, will give the farming community many more years of uncertainty, unless the millennium talks at the World Trade Organisation blow it out of the water, which I suspect will happen. Under the deal that the Prime Minister brought back, common agricultural policy spending will increase until 2003, and will start to fall after that only if world markets improve and the CAP can reduce exports of EU surpluses, which is unlikely.

Three points from the deal affect farmers in my constituency. The first is the muddle over the dairy quota. We have heard a lot about that. I understand that officials are considering extending the dairy quota until 2008, which is two years beyond the competence of the Commission. That will cause great uncertainty for dairy farmers.

On hill beef, the rules for extensification rates have been changed, regardless of the landscape of the farms. Presumably, hill farmers will have to get rid of some of their cows. Perversely, because the headage subsidy is going up, it is providing more of an incentive to the intensive rearing of livestock at the expense of the hill farmers. I should be grateful if the Minister would consider that.

We must also consider the future of the intervention regime which is one of the worst barriers to stability in the beef market. Once again, we do not know whether we shall have an intervention regime that provides a proper safety net. As long as 400,000 tonnes of beef are sitting in storage overhanging the market, investment will always be prejudiced by the fact that that beef could swamp the market at any particular price. It is ridiculous that the EU continues to buy beef in Ireland under the intervention regime and sell it as frozen beef in other EU countries, disturbing their internal beef markets.

I conclude with two points about costs. I welcome the Minister's announcement today about abattoir costs. Will he also consider not increasing the veterinary inspection of sheep for export? As my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) said, more than 700,000 lambs have gone out on the Farmers Ferry service. That has made a substantial difference to the market here; doubling up the veterinary inspections and putting in Ministry vets, which will increase costs, will do further damage to the market. I know that the Minister disapproves—perhaps all Labour Members do—but those exports are an important source of income particularly for hill farmers. We should be encouraging them instead of trying to strangle them with red tape.

9.42 pm

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): As I have less time than anyone else, I shall be extremely brief. I shall concentrate on the pig industry as I represent Brigg and Goole. Hon. Members will be aware that in north Lincolnshire and the east riding of Yorkshire, pigs are extremely important.

In Britain, pigs are not only a high-quality product, but are produced to welfare standards that are the envy of the world. We should say more about those standards. I pay tribute to the previous Government for introducing the legislation that brought in those welfare standards. As I chair the all-party animal welfare group, I try to embrace all-party persuasions on these matters. I was concerned that hon. Members might say that we should back away from those standards because of difficulties in the sector. Instead, we need to drive standards up and I am sure that we can do that.

Since January, pig prices have increased by about 26 per cent., which is welcome, but they are still too low. Perhaps more importantly, we have opened up a 20 per cent. differential between our price and that charged by our European partners, so perhaps there is something in the idea that we can get a premium for the standards that we achieve here.

That point brings me to the Meat and Livestock Commission. I know what my right hon. Friend the Minister has said, but people within the industry are

[Mr. Ian Cawsey]

sceptical about the standard of service that the MLC has delivered recently. Farmers are required to pay a statutory levy, but although my right hon. Friend is convinced that the MLC is doing a better job—and I was involved in the launch of the charter mark and stood in a supermarket in Goole handing out British pork—and although some things are going the right way, much more needs to be done to win back farmers' confidence in the MLC. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will take that on board.

Tonight, we have discussed European subsidies to the pig industry in other countries. The farmers in my constituency are thoroughly convinced that subsidies are paid in other European countries. I have taken the matter up with MAFF and been told that that is not the case. I am heartened by what my right hon. Friend said—that he is making inquiries—but something has to be done. If we find evidence, we shall pass it on to Ministers and expect them to take action. My right hon. Friend says that he is discussing the matter with other European countries. When he has finished those deliberations, I hope that he will make a statement because there is no confidence whatsoever in the claim that there are no such subsidies—although I hope that that it is the case. It is what we need to help the British sector.

Finally, Liberal Democrat Members mentioned economic and monetary union in the context of agriculture. We need to debate that; we cannot pretend that it is not happening across Europe. My constituency is involved in agriculture and steel. When I meet the National Farmers Union, British Steel and the Iron and Steel Trade Confederation, they all tell me to move forward on this issue. There has never been a more unlikely alliance than that of those three. We will not resolve that matter tonight in this short debate, but we do need to talk seriously about it.

9.45 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I start by thanking the Minister of State for allowing me the lion's share of the winding-up time. I appreciate his generosity.

Many hon. Members have spoken—and many more wanted to speak—in the debate. The Minister addressed us with his usual friendly and disarming style. He made it clear, as did some Labour Back Benchers, that he wanted to depoliticise the issue. That is fair enough; it has been the cry of Ministers over the years whenever they have known that they are on weak ground. The Government are accountable, and it is the job of the Opposition and the House to hold them to account.

I unreservedly welcome the Minister's decision to defer the specified risk material charges. The Opposition have called for that for many months—as he will concede—and I am pleased that he has reacted as he has. We welcome the study that he has announced, although we wonder why it has taken so long to set it up. We welcome also the talks that he is having with the banks on the state of farmers' accounts.

The hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) referred to rural projects, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). These are important, and we believe that the structure funds are a crucial part of the development of an agricultural policy. The Minister blustered at my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), saying that looking for numbers in the consultation paper was not the right way in which to consider it. However, if one talks to people in the country, the clear impression given by the absence of agriculture from the document is that, somehow, the Government believe that rural communities do not need farming to exist.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Does my hon. Friend agree that the creation of a level playing field is essential for British farming, and that imports produced by methods that are illegal in this country should not be allowed in?

Mr. Paice: I agree, and my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk made exactly that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk promised that I would say a few words about the sheep industry. It is perfectly true, and very welcome, that new-crop lambs are making more than they did last year, but the collapse from the high point has been much greater than it was last year. We must accept that prospects for prices are not good, and that they are not helped by the extra ewes that were held back because there was no demand for culls last year.

Sheep producers now face more problems. The British Wool Marketing Board has warned this week that wool prices this year may not even cover the cost of shearing, due largely to the strength of sterling. We await the Government's plans for extensification and what is to replace the hill livestock compensatory allowance, and we look forward to their response.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) referred to the Parliamentary Secretary's obsession with live exports. It started with an absurd statement, at a Meat and Livestock Commission lunch a couple of months ago, that the live export trade did not help prices.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): It has not.

Mr. Paice: That is interesting. The hon. Gentleman should look at what his hon. Friend the Minister of State has said in answer to a parliamentary question, where he has clearly refuted such utter nonsense. The trade has made a difference.

The increase in the costs of inspection has been mentioned in a press release entitled "A Blueprint to a Better Future"; it should probably have been called "A Blueprint to No Future". The cost to Farmers Ferry—as has been described—will now be 50p per sheep more than before. The Ministry's own guidance states that that should be recovered from the producer, as if they could afford any more.

The Opposition support high welfare standards for the UK and across Europe, but the new rules smack much more of the Parliamentary Secretary's desire to destroy the trade than to improve welfare. It makes no difference to a sheep whether it is crossing the Minches to be fattened on the Scottish mainland or crossing the channel to be slaughtered. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton

and Ripon mentioned the groundwater regulations, which require a £100 registration fee and further costs for disposal.

Finally on the subject of sheep, our armed forces are still being fed almost exclusively on imported lamb. That underlines an absurdity in the Minister's position. He rightly praises British food, its quality and the welfare standards behind it. He exhorts the supermarkets to promote British meat and claims to have done deals with them, but the Government will not put their money where their mouth is. It is not only lamb that is involved. Half the bacon and ham used by our forces is imported—that is close to £2.5 million-worth of trade. The beef situation is even more daft. Because of the export ban, our forces abroad cannot be fed British beef. Will the Minister give an undertaking that as soon as beef exports can resume, he will ensure that British forces overseas get it?

The Minister dismissed the criticism of his response to the Agriculture Committee's report on pigs. The fact is that across the agriculture industry, his response was seen as complacent irresponsibility. His response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on the issue of specified offal bore little resemblance to the response he gave to the Committee and its recommendations. I can tell the Minister, because he challenged us, that of course we support the farm assurance scheme and anything that will emphasise the quality of British food.

The Minister was also questioned about the growth promoters that have been banned for use in pigs. I find it astonishing that the Government are still prepared to subject British consumers to food that contains residues that could be damaging to health, which is in odd contrast to the beef on the bone issue.

Several hon. Members touched on the issue of TB, which is affecting both dairy and beef producers. The breakdowns have been rising at some 40 per cent. a year for the past two years and the geographical area is spreading. The Minister of State has said over and again that the problem is very important and that resources are not an issue, but the fact remains that nearly 18 months after the Krebs report, only two of the 10 trial areas are up and running. It will be another year before they are all complete. That means that it will be another six years before we get any results. What about the rest of the country during that time? The NFU has estimated that breakdowns cost farmers £27,000 on average, far more than the compensation for the value of the animal, which the Government rightly pay. It has made proposals for dealing with the rest of the country during the study period and we look forward to the Minister's response very soon.

The Conservatives do not claim that all farming's problems are the fault of the Government. They are not responsible for what happened in Russia, for example.

Mr. Martlew: We were not responsible for BSE.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman goes on about BSE and that has been the theme throughout this debate. Beef prices today are some 8p a kilo lower than they were three weeks after the announcement in March 1996. They collapsed after that announcement, stayed at that level for a year and have now gone further down. It was not the previous Government who put a cap on the amount of 30-month scheme money for cull cows: it was this Government. They have made a bad situation worse. Since Labour came to office, cattle prices are down, lamb is down, pigs are down and milk is down. If that were not enough, the Government have heaped cost upon cost on the industry, including meat hygiene charges—not the ones that the Minister has, thankfully, deferred today, but ones that they previously implemented—cattle passports, groundwater charges, the costs of deboning and the fuel price increases. We have had two emergency Christmas packages and one of them has not yet been finally paid out.

The Minister has spent nine months with his arm around farmers' shoulders saying that he wants to listen and to learn, but the good will that he has engendered will not last for ever. Tonight, we have tried to provide some of the answers. It is time that the Minister reacted to what he has learned. There is an old English saying that fine words butter no bread. Under Labour, farmers cannot afford the bread. It is time to deliver.

9.54 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): The debate has been useful and interesting. The United Kingdom livestock population—cattle, sheep and pigs—totals more than the human population. It varies over the season, but amounts to around 65 million.

Let me spell out the subsidies that the taxpayer pays to the livestock industry: for 1998, beef special premium was £248 million, suckler cow premium was £250 million, sheep annual premium was estimated at £371 million and hill livestock compensatory allowances were £109 million, and they are estimated to be £171 million for 1999. The industry is highly dependent on subsidies. The idea that the Government are not providing taxpayers' money is abject nonsense.

Several hon. Members raised the issue of bovine tuberculosis, and we await with interest the report of the Select Committee on Agriculture. The Government will respond as quickly as we can, and we shall take all the report's recommendations seriously. The Committee has done the House a service in educating many hon. Members about the seriousness of an extremely complex issue. Any attempt to discuss that issue simplistically conflicts with reality.

To the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who has just wound himself up, I must say that when the beef ban is lifted and British beef can be exported, we will make it a priority to supply British beef to our armed forces. As the Prime Minister said today, European Commission inspectors visited UK abattoirs, farms and the centre in Gloucester that will run the date-based export scheme during a five-day stay last week. They have promised to respond as quickly as possible, and that usually takes about 20 working days. We are doing our best to pre-empt any questions that the inspectors may raise by giving them all the information that they request as soon as we can.

We cannot say when beef will be exported. It will happen as soon as possible. At least one plant—possibly two—is ready to go when it has been approved under the admittedly complex rules of the date-based export scheme. Other abattoirs are queueing up to see what happens.

The ban on beef on the bone has been raised as if it were a simple matter. People have died, and are dying. I regret that more people will die as a result of new variant

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. We are guided by the advice of the chief medical officer. Woe betide any Minister who ignores such advice. We have promised to review the ban in the summer, six months after the advice given in February. We shall again act on the CMO's advice.

Abattoirs were a continuing theme of the debate, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made an important announcement. I accept that some abattoirs have closed under the Labour Government: there are about 300 in England, compared with 384 in December 1996. In 1979, however, there were 975 abattoirs. What we heard tonight resembled the old myth about grammar schools: in fact, more closed under Mrs. T than ever did under a Labour Minister. We can never match the number of abattoirs closed by the Tories, because there are not enough left.

We have no policy to close abattoirs. Our policy is to raise standards in the industry and to make sure that the taxpayer does not pay a disproportionate share of the cost of necessary controls. That is what we seek to do in the announcements made by my right hon. Friend today and in our inquiry into the industry over the coming weeks.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 161, Noes 319.

Division No. 150] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Caroline Spelman and Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Berrningham, Gerald
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony

Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 316, Noes 160.

Division No. 151] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte

Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
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Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
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Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
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Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian

Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyne, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Caroline Spelman and Mr. Tim Collins.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises the difficulties faced by many in the livestock sector; welcomes the Government's strong commitment to the livestock sector in the United Kingdom; endorses the efforts the Government has made to secure the lifting of the ban on the worldwide export of British beef; approves of the steps which the Government has taken since May 1997 to support the beef and sheep industry via EU agri-monetary compensation; welcomes the initiatives the Government has taken to promote the pig industry; recognises the extra support to the livestock sector, particularly hill and upland producers via substantially increased hill livestock compensatory allowances, announced in November 1998; and welcomes the recently-agreed reshaping of the Common Agricultural Policy as part of the Agenda 2000 negotiations, which seeks to provide the livestock sector with stability and a secure future.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

SUPREME COURT OF ENGLAND AND WALES

That the draft Civil Procedure (Modification of Enactments) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 13th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT (MAY)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Friday 30th April, do adjourn till Tuesday 4th May.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

Question agreed to.

Lancashire Police (Stephen Lawman)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

10.28 pm

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): This is the first time that I have had the privilege of speaking in an Adjournment debate. I regret having to raise the matters that I intend to raise on the Floor of the House this evening, but they are of serious concern to my constituents in Lancashire and ought to be placed on the record of the House of Commons. However, I recognise at the outset that there is probably only a limited amount that my hon. Friend the Minister of State can do when he responds to my contribution.

The issue starts with a constituent of mine, Mrs. Lorraine Sharrock, who lives in Lostock Hall. For three or four years in the mid-1990s, she received a series of malicious telephone calls at her home and her place of work. Despite the fact that she changed her telephone number and went ex-directory, and changed the number of her workplace telephone, the calls persisted. She contacted Lancashire police, which carried out an investigation.

Eventually, on 7 July 1998, Stephen Lawman was convicted of making eight malicious phone calls to Mrs. Sharrock between March and July 1996. Those were a sample of calls that the police were able to track down and prove before the court. Mr. Stephen Lawman was at that time a detective inspector working in the section dealing with the tracing of malicious phone calls at the Lancashire police headquarters at Hutton, which is also in my constituency. One can imagine my constituent's concern and horror when the very people to whom she went to seek to track the source of the malicious phone calls ended up harbouring the person who was responsible for them.

Stephen Lawman appealed against his conviction at Preston magistrates court, and Lancashire police decided in their wisdom that he should continue to serve as a police officer. He was not suspended, although he was moved to other duties.

In the autumn of last year, I had a meeting with David Smith, assistant chief constable of Lancashire police, and in charge of discipline, to express my concern at the fact that, despite Mr. Lawman's conviction, he had not been suspended. I recognise that it would have been very difficult for the police to change their decision following the conviction, as an appeal hearing was pending, but felt it my duty to express my concern, and that of many of my constituents, at such a decision.

In February, Mr. Lawman withdrew his appeal, and Lancashire police suspended him from duty pending the outcome of disciplinary proceedings. That hearing was held in front of the chief constable, Pauline Clare, on 16 March. After that hearing, the chief constable announced the decision that Detective Inspector Lawman would be demoted to the post of sergeant. He would therefore continue to serve as a police officer in Lancashire—and a senior police officer at that.

I must make it clear that, at that point, I spoke very strongly of my abhorrence at the decision of Lancashire police and the fact that it undermined the confidence of many people in the police force. Many women in Lancashire in particular feel that their position has been undermined, given that a police officer working in the very department responsible for tracing malicious phone calls was convicted of making such calls, but continued to serve as a senior officer of Lancashire police.

I recognise that the regulations in the disciplinary code have been followed and that the decision probably cannot be overturned or challenged in any way. I now understand that the time limits for Sergeant Lawman—as he now is—to appeal against that decision have expired. That appeal, had it taken place, would have been to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who is also a Lancashire Member of Parliament.

I raise this matter to put on the record my serious concern at what has happened. For more than 22 years before I came to this place, I served as an officer of various tribunals in the north-west of England, dealing with appeals on local taxation. Over those years, I must have dealt with thousands of appeals, and helped to give advice to tribunals and draft reasons for decisions in thousands of cases. I recognise that, from time to time, rogue decisions are inevitable in any judicial process.

I have tried to find out the reasons for the chief constable's decision and I was read a transcript of it yesterday, by one of the solicitors at Lancashire police headquarters. I must point out that I tried to arrange a meeting with the chief constable and the chair of the police authority, but failed to do so.

One of the reasons for the chief constable allowing Stephen Lawman to continue as a serving officer in Lancashire is that he has a wife and family who should not be punished for his actions. I should be interested to know whether that is a valid factor to take into account in disciplinary hearings, because the implication is that an officer without children, or who is not married, would not be dealt with in the same way as other officers.

I have serious concerns about the signal that has been sent to my constituents. I met Mrs. Sharrock and her husband on Friday evening to explain what I would be talking about tonight. She is still very angry and upset about the way in which the police have dealt with this case. She remains concerned about what work Sergeant Lawman is doing, as he is still working at Lancashire police headquarters.

I have spoken to a number of police officers in the past few weeks. Every officer with whom I have discussed the case is appalled and disgusted by the decision and feels, as I do, that it reflects badly on them as police officers. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made a number of speeches in the autumn that made it clear that he was concerned that disciplinary proceedings for police officers should be firm and fair, but we should send to the general public the signal that they can continue to have confidence in the police, and that wrongdoing in the police service will not be tolerated and will be dealt with most severely.

The Home Office is reviewing disciplinary procedures within the police service. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister whether the circumstances of the Stephen Lawman case can be examined in detail by the Department to see what lessons can be learned. I should like the code of practice used by police authorities and chief police officers to deal with disciplinary offences to be clear, because I am very concerned. I have spent a lot of time looking into this case, and there may be others that have been dealt with similarly.

One of the things that have saddened me in the past few weeks is the comment, which has been made by a number of my constituents, that the police look after their own. I do not believe that that is true in the majority of cases, and Lancashire police would be angry if that were thought to be so. However, this particular case, and the way that it has been handled, has sent all the wrong signals—about the police force, about women making complaints about how cases have been dealt with and about the seriousness with which the police service takes such crimes.

The making of malicious phone calls to women is not a trivial crime, even though it may be dealt with by a fine in a magistrates court. Such calls cause a great deal of distress. Although it was proved in court that eight calls were made by Stephen Lawman over three or four months, calls were made over three or four years and there were many of them.

My constituent's dissatisfaction with the outcome of the case is profound and I feel that it is my duty, as her Member of Parliament, to ensure that that is placed on the record in the House of Commons.

10.40 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) has exercised a time-honoured right to raise a matter of serious concern in his constituency on the Floor of the House. Anyone taking the trouble, as I have done, to acquaint themselves with the facts of this case will understand why he has chosen to take this course of action, which he has exercised with great care, dignity, balance and moderation, and he is to be commended.

The conduct of former Detective Inspector Lawman was appalling. There can be no excuse for what he did. I can find no mitigating circumstance. Anyone concerned, as the Government have to be, with the reputation and integrity of the police service would be concerned about this case. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is acquainted with the facts of the case, and shares my concern. The Government are absolutely determined to stem any erosion of public confidence in the police service. That is why, at the beginning of this month, the Home Secretary introduced measures to modernise and make more effective the procedures for dealing with police discipline.

Lawman's case was dealt with under the old procedure, but some of the issues that it raised show the relevance of the new measures that we have introduced. We cannot say whether the outcome would have been different, because the operation of the discipline procedure is a matter for chief constables. They are entrusted with the responsibility of making a judgment about whether an officer is guilty of a discipline charge and what punishment should be imposed.

It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the punishment imposed on Mr. Lawman by the chief constable of the Lancashire constabulary. I shall ensure, however, that she reads what has been said in this debate, so that she is fully aware of the concerns that have been expressed. At the same time, I shall invite her to write to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble with any comments that she thinks may help him to understand her decision.

Before I say more about the new discipline procedures, I think it would be right, albeit at the risk of repetition, for me to go back over some of the details in Mr. Lawman's case that have been provided to my officials by Lancashire constabulary. As I said, these issues clearly show how the new measures will make a real difference.

Lawman was convicted of the criminal offence of using public telecommunications systems for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another, under section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. The behaviour that he was charged with was restricted to calls made during the last 12 months of the total period of conduct complained of by Mrs. Sharrock. That is because, under section 103 of the 1984 Act, proceedings for an offence under section 43 must be brought within 12 months of the offence.

I understand that, during the 12-month period, nine calls to Mrs. Sharrock were traced by British Telecommunications engineers back to Mr. Lawman's home number, and that these were silent calls. Such calls have an insidious nature all of their own. Mr. Lawman received the heaviest penalty available for an offence under section 43, which is a fine of £1,000. He was also ordered to pay £350 in costs.

The nine silent telephone calls were only part of the matters of which Mrs. Sharrock complained. Other telephone calls, of an offensive nature, were alleged to have been made before the 12-month period. Lancashire constabulary investigated these allegations and put the evidence before the Crown Prosecution Service, whose responsibility it is to decide whether to institute criminal proceedings.

Although section 43 of the 1984 Act was not an option because of the time limit, another possibility was an offence of actual bodily harm based on psychological harm. The Crown Prosecution Service decided, however, that there was insufficient evidence for the purposes of bringing proceedings. The House will appreciate that I am unable to comment on that decision.

Following conviction on 7 July 1998, Mr. Lawman indicated that he would appeal. On 31 July 1998, he was charged with the discipline offence of criminal conduct, in that he had been found guilty of the criminal offence under the Telecommunications Act 1984. On 16 February 1999, he abandoned his appeal, and two days later he was suspended from duty.

There is a wide power to suspend an officer under both the old police discipline procedure and the new one. In the event of an allegation from which it appears that an officer may have committed a disciplinary or criminal offence, he can be suspended at least until the disciplinary matter is resolved. The reason given for not suspending Mr. Lawman earlier is, in effect, that he had an outstanding appeal. The chief constable may want to consider elaborating on that when writing to my hon. Friend.

On 16 March 1999, Mr. Lawman appeared before the chief constable to answer the discipline charge. He pleaded guilty, and the chief constable reduced his rank to that of sergeant. As I have said, responsibility for making the decision rested with the chief constable alone, and I cannot comment on it.

The disciplinary charge brought against Mr. Lawman was confined to the matters that caused his criminal conviction. The deputy chief constable decided that it would be inappropriate to bring additional disciplinary charges against Mr. Lawman in relation to Mrs. Sharrock's

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

other charges. A factor in that decision was the provision in section 104 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 that an officer brought before the courts on a criminal charge should not thereafter face a disciplinary charge that was, in substance, the same. The reason for that provision was avoidance of what is known as "double jeopardy"—trying someone twice for the same offence.

In hearing the disciplinary charge against Mr. Lawman, the chief constable therefore had before her only matters relating to Mr. Lawman's criminal conviction, not Mrs. Sharrock's other complaints. Whether the chief constable would have imposed a different punishment if the substance of the discipline charge had been wider cannot be known. The "double jeopardy" rule was undoubtedly a factor, however, and was one of the things that we changed at the beginning of this month in the Police (Conduct) Regulations 1999, made under the Police Act 1996.

We have lowered the standard of proof required at a disciplinary hearing from the criminal standard of "beyond reasonable doubt" to the civil standard of "on the balance of probabilities". I hope my hon. Friend will accept that that in itself makes the procedure more effective, but it has also made it possible to remove the "double jeopardy" restriction. That means that, in a case in which criminal proceedings against an officer are restricted to matters where the evidence is sufficient to meet the higher standard of proof, it will in future be possible to charge him with other related matters where the evidence is sufficient only to meet the lower standard of proof. Forces can now bring discipline charges that reflect a wider pattern of misconduct. That option was not available under the old procedure, when Mr. Lawman's case was dealt with.

Another new measure is the fast-track procedure for dealing swiftly with police officers who are caught committing serious criminal offences. Cases under that procedure will be heard within six weeks of being identified, in advance of criminal proceedings.

I understand that Mrs. Sharrock has been through a distressing experience, and feels deeply about the way in which Mr. Lawman has been dealt with. I abhor the criminal conduct of this officer. He has not only caused Mrs. Sharrock deep distress, but brought shame on himself and cast a cloud over the decent, hard-working officers with whom he served. No one should for a moment forget the enormous responsibilities with which police officers are burdened, or the fact that the overwhelming majority discharge them with honour and distinction. Mr. Lawman did not. The fact that he continues to serve among those officers who day in and day out do, however surprising it may be, is—as I am sure my hon. Friend will understand—a matter for the chief constable alone. The Government have shown, and will continue to show, absolute commitment to effective police discipline by making available to chief officers improved machinery to deal with individuals who have shown themselves unfit to remain as police officers, should they choose to use it. In this instance, the chief constable chose not to use the powers available to her.

There are lessons to be learned from this case, and we shall reflect on them. Mrs. Sharrock, in the meanwhile, has our deepest sympathy and understanding, and our commitment to ensure that the lessons of her case are learned and acted upon.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 22 April 1999

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

The Minister was asked—

Flood Defences

1. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright** (Great Yarmouth): What money is being made available to improve flood defences. [80342]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): Following the comprehensive spending review, the Ministry is making £230 million of funding available over the next three years for flood defence and coast protection capital works. This represents an increase of £23 million over previous plans.

Mr. Wright: I welcome the Government's initiative in providing increased funding in this important area. Perhaps the Minister recalls his visit to my constituency and to Scratby and the California Cliffs area, where he witnessed the benefits provided by the extra money spent on coastal defence in that region. We will endeavour to extend that work further south this summer to Caister-on-Sea. Will the Minister outline the progress that is being made with the Bye report, which was commissioned after the Northampton floods last year?

Mr. Morley: I enjoyed my visit to my hon. Friend's constituency. It was useful to see the coastal problems at first hand and to consider how the Ministry can work with local authorities to address them. I am pleased to report to the House that substantial progress has been made with the Bye report. We are on target in terms of the objectives agreed with the Environment Agency in relation to reviewing flood warning dissemination and flood risk planning.

Yesterday I had a constructive meeting with the Local Government Association, the Association of Drainage Authorities and the Environment Agency to agree high-level targets for achieving progress in reviewing flood defence procedures. Those targets were agreed, and we are on course to review flood defence and coastal protection provisions in this country.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I thank the Minister for the interest that he has shown in the recent flooding in the Derwent valley, particularly in Malton and Norton in my constituency. I thank the Minister for his visit to my area, which was much appreciated. He may be surprised to learn that another flood warning was issued last night—if this keeps up, we will be applying for fishing quotas.

On a serious note, the Minister will not be surprised to learn that many people were disappointed by his decision yesterday not to allow a public inquiry,even though I understand the reasons for that decision. Will the Minister confirm today that the integrated review that he has mentioned will take place and will provide a mechanism to deal independently, within the review process, with genuine concerns about drainage in the Derwent basin and allegations that flood defences were not maintained? Will some of the money that the Minister has announced to the House today be made available for strengthening flood defences in the Derwent valley region?

Mr. Morley: It was a useful meeting. I appreciated the assistance of the hon. Gentleman when I visited his constituency and talked to those who had been affected. I pay tribute to the emergency services, the local council and the Environment Agency, which worked around the clock dealing with the emergency at Malton and in other parts of the region.

I considered carefully the request for a public inquiry into the Malton floods, and I understand the reasonable points that the hon. Gentleman makes. The difficulty with public inquiries is that they deflect time and resources that could be used to rectify the problems. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are reviewing the national flood warning system. As to problems in Malton, if the hon. Gentleman considers it appropriate, I shall ensure that his constituents are able to feed through issues to the national review. If there are lessons to be learned from Malton and improvements to be made, they will be identified in the overall review.

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): I welcome the interest that the Minister has taken in flooding, particularly the Easter floods last year. He will be aware that the floods on Christmas day and on the day after Boxing day also affected many homes in Sileby in my constituency—after we were told that floods like those at Easter occurred only once every hundred years. I welcome the extra money, but the schemes proposed to alleviate future flooding problems will cost £4 million or £5 million.

Is the Minister aware of the problems faced by smaller local authorities such as Charnwood and Melton, which have yearly budgets of only £5 million? Will the Minister consider providing assistance to those authorities in Leicestershire in order to alleviate those recurring problems? Every time it rains, many residents fear that their houses will be flooded again.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend has been very active in this area on behalf of his constituents. Smaller local authorities face particular problems, especially where there are non-mains water courses and when different agencies have different responsibilities. I am prepared to look sympathetically at my hon. Friend's request regarding the overall strategy and the way in which we prioritise schemes.

Irish Sea (CFP)

2. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will make a statement on the factors relating to the common fisheries policy which currently affect fishing opportunities in the Irish sea. [80343]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Government will continue to press for improvements to the common fisheries policy to make it a more effective instrument for conserving fish stocks in the Irish sea and elsewhere.

Mr. Jack: Does the Minister agree that the Irish sea presents an opportunity for the creation of a new mechanism to help fishermen have more input into and control over their future opportunities? Will he consider setting up a fisheries forum for the Irish sea area, comprising Government and industry representatives from Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, to formulate a report on fishing possibilities and management in that area which could go to the Fisheries Council in December further to inform its decision making?

Mr. Morley: That is a very constructive suggestion. A number of regional committees have already been set up, and the Government are keen to develop them. There is merit in the concept of a forum to consider Irish sea management. Other member states traditionally have fishing interests in the Irish sea, and we must bear those in mind. Nevertheless, those are measures in which we can involve the fishing industry and develop a more regional dimension of fisheries management, which will be welcomed not only by the industry and by this country but by other European Union countries. The right hon. Gentleman's suggestion is certainly more rational than some of those made by Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome, as I do, the late conversion of the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) to a more positive involvement in fisheries policy.

In developing a regional method of organising fisheries, will my hon. Friend consider using designated ports such as Fleetwood as regional centres for co-ordinating such a strategy, so that fishermen will have a genuine say in the development of fisheries policy?

Mr. Morley: I shall consider that. I know that my hon. Friend, her local authority, Associated British Ports and the local fishermen have been campaigning hard to make Fleetwood a centre of excellence for fishing port facilities in the Irish sea, and there are good arguments for doing so. On designated ports, fishing vessels have been landing at Liverpool, but it would surely be more logical for them to land at a dedicated fishing port where there are market and support facilities.

I welcome my hon. Friend's comments. Fleetwood has a great deal to offer the fishing industry and has certainly been progressive in the way that it has marketed and projected itself.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Welcome though the Minister's response might be in some respects, his position on fisheries policy would carry a little more credibility if he had not already made it clear that he is not even discussing a zonal plan with his opposite numbers in Europe. He believes that the industry should develop that plan.

Is not national control the key issue? The Conservative party has pledged to secure the return of national control, whereas the hon. Gentleman has pledged to ensure that control remains in Brussels. Does not he ever feel slightly ill at ease in having nailed his colours so firmly to the mast of common fisheries policy, with minor tinkering here and there, when that policy has failed on conservation and has failed this country?

Mr. Morley: The problem with the hon. Gentleman's comments is that we do not know exactly what the Conservative party means by a return of national control. We have no idea how the Conservatives intend to achieve it. To make any progress, they would need the support of the European Union, and their past record reveals that they made no progress whatever in getting the beef ban lifted or dealing with quota hoppers.

It is clear to us that some of our current problems, including charges in slaughterhouses, which were agreed under the previous Administration, and the ending of duty free, are due to the fact that the European Union took no notice of the Conservative party because of its negative, destructive and divided attitude to Europe. There is no possibility of the Conservatives achieving their policy unless they are prepared to say that they would leave the EU altogether, because that would be the consequence of their position. They ought to be honest and say where they stand on that point.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I remind my hon. Friend that a Conservative Government betrayed our fisheries and fishing communities in their eagerness to join the then European Economic Community. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) has come up with a good idea for the management of Irish sea fisheries. I hope that the issue is dealt with at the Council of the Isles when it gets under way. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that we need to manage those fishing stocks on a regional basis, with preferences for our local fishermen. Nomadic fishermen from France, Spain and elsewhere should be given the bum's rush.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is quite right. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) is a former fisheries Minister, which is why he has had no truck with the nonsense that we have just heard expressed from the Opposition Front Bench. What is being urged by the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) is just not achievable. However, there is certainly a strong case for reform of the common fisheries policy, and the right hon. Gentleman has made some sensible suggestions for doing that, as has my hon. Friend. Those are the sort of issues on which I think we can make progress. We certainly cannot make progress with a xenophobic position that would result in complete withdrawal from the European Union.

Food Hygiene and Animal Welfare

3. **Mr. Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What steps he is taking to ensure that British farmers compete on even terms with countries that operate to lower food hygiene and animal welfare standards. [80344]

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): Food imports from third counties must meet the same or equivalent hygiene standards as food produced within the European Union. Common minimum EU welfare standards for farm animals come into effect at the end of this year. There is no animal welfare component to the World Trade Organisation agreements. WTO rules do not therefore allow discrimination against third country imports on animal welfare grounds.

Mr. Loughton: So much for common minimum standards. After all the talk about animal welfare standards before the election, when will the Minister put his money where his mouth is and at least test the water by imposing a ban on the import of animal products that do not match up to the rigorous food hygiene and animal welfare standards that we demand and expect of farmers in this country?

Mr. Brown: There are already effective laws in place to protect British consumers on food hygiene and food safety issues. I cannot unilaterally introduce rules on animal welfare restrictions—

Mr. Loughton: Why not?

Mr. Brown: Because it would be illegal to do so. We debated this matter at some length last night, when the point made by the hon. Gentleman was advanced from the Opposition Front Bench. The simple response is this: it is illegal to do as he asks.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): While I recognise what my right hon. Friend has said, we have always had problems with imports from some third countries outside the European Union. Do we not have to find some way within the World Trade Organisation of taking steps to ensure that there are better welfare and hygiene standards in other countries from which we import via some EU member states?

Mr. Brown: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. I have already said at the Council of Ministers, and repeated in last night's debate, that I am seeking an animal welfare component to the WTO rules as they apply to agriculture.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Can the Minister be more specific when he says that he is seeking an animal welfare component? Who is seeking that on behalf of the Government? Is it the right hon. Gentleman? Is the Chancellor backing the proposal? What active steps are the Government taking?

Will the Minister acknowledge that this is not only an outside-the-European-Union issue? We know for certain that there are standards in other member states that do not meet those that we apply to ourselves. We must be robust about this. I return, therefore, to the issue that I raised with the Minister last night. Rather than waiting for ever and a day for Europe to get its act together on labelling, could the Government not take pre-emptive action in a domestic context and be far more forward thinking on accurate labelling where animal welfare standards are concerned?

Mr. Brown: The farm assured scheme, which is in place, is a labelling scheme. There is a pigmeat welfare component to the scheme. I urge the House to get behind that scheme and to support it in the marketplace. That is where we shall get a premium for the United Kingdom pig industry.

The question of how to negotiate the welfare component to the WTO agreements is being discussed among Ministers at European Union level. Agriculture Ministers have already had one session on the issue. The Government are preparing their own stance. I shall have some input, as will other Ministers, particularly my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Would my right hon. Friend agree that at the very time our major competitors are beginning to become increasingly interested in welfare and environmental standards—especially the Danes, the Dutch and the French—we would send just the wrong signal if we started lowering ours?

Mr. Brown: No one is advocating lowering the standards. Indeed, consumers are looking for proper information—not only about food standards, but about ethical methods of production—so that they can consume in a discerning way. People look for the animal welfare component in the marketplace. I think that they are right to do so, and the Government should stand their corner.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): Government policy seems to be based on the proposition that if goods are of better quality and produced to higher welfare standards, British consumers will buy them. What assessment has been made to prove that proposition correct? Is it not a fact that people may buy on the basis of price rather than of quality?

Mr. Brown: At least in part because of the work that I have undertaken with the Meat and Livestock Commission, we have secured a premium for United Kingdom pigmeat, for example, in the marketplace. The prices are about 20 or 25 per cent. higher than the European Union average in the UK market at the moment, and it is up to all of us to work hard to ensure that we are able to maintain that price differential, which advantages producers. My effort is directed to getting the industry back to profitability so that producers can face the future with some certainty. I will be in Northern Ireland tomorrow and hope to have an opportunity to discuss those matters with Northern Ireland farm leaders.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South–East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a bit cheeky of the Tories to come into the Chamber and apparently show concern for food safety when their policies created, one after the other, the food scandals that lowered confidence in British food to such an extent that we cannot compete in our own country, never mind outside it? I congratulate him on the

work that he is putting in to rebuild confidence in British food so that we in the United Kingdom can believe in it and, more important, so that we can again export it abroad.

Mr. Brown: The only way through those issues is to work in co-operation and partnership with our partners in the European Union. We have made substantial progress so far. There is much more to be done. I commend to the House the United Kingdom's policy of constructive engagement with our European partners, and absolutely reject the policies that were pursued by the previous Conservative Government.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Will the Minister give wholehearted support to any efforts made by the European Commission to block the payment by the French Government of illegal subsidies to French pig farmers who do not meet the same high animal welfare standards as British pig farmers observe?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman must give me his evidence of illegal payments by any other national Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, come on."] He is making the allegation, and it is incumbent on him to substantiate it. I invite him to give me his evidence; if it is hard evidence of illegal activities within the EU, I will take it up at once with the Commission. I cannot assert higher UK animal welfare standards where the EU has already legislated for its own common standards. The Commission will defend EU common standards, not higher standards asserted by the UK Parliament—under the Conservative Government.

4. **Mr. Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): If he will make a statement on his proposals for the reform of the food hygiene regulations. [80345]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): We have made no proposals for reform of food hygiene regulations. The European Commission—this is a harmonised subject—is expected to make a comprehensive proposal later this year, consolidating existing European Union hygiene legislation. We are fully behind that initiative.

Mr. Vaz: I welcome the Minister's commitment to toughening up food hygiene regulations. What contribution will the new Food Standards Agency make to improving the food hygiene regulations? Will my hon. Friend undertake to meet my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to explore the role that local authorities have in prosecuting those who breach the regulations?

Mr. Rooker: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks about the proposed Food Standards Agency. Setting up the agency presents an opportunity for a full review of our own regulations to make sure that they are fair, practical, proportionate and not onerous, and that they underpin our prime public health objective of making sure that our food is safe. Nevertheless, we have the opportunity to consolidate 14 European Union directives in one to achieve better clarity in the regulations, which will be a great advantage.

Prosecution policy is a matter for local authorities. We do not order them to prosecute; they have a duty, in policing the food system, to prosecute when they consider that to be the right course.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): When considering the application to food hygiene of fair and proportionate regulations, will the Minister also consider the proposed cost of the Meat Hygiene Service? Will he take into account the position of a constituent of mine, Mr. Joseph Morris of South Kilworth, whose charges will rise fivefold and who will have to employ three inspectors to look after a work force of five? Will he also consider the position of Mr. Marcus Stevens of Ullesthorpe, whose charges will rise by 1,000 per cent.? What does the Minister intend to tell those people, who will be driven out of business? Will he please not blame the last Government? It may have escaped his notice that the present Government have been in power for two years.

Mr. Rooker: I can only suggest that the hon. Gentleman give the advice that we suggested about a month ago, and tell his constituents to check the invoices. So far we have proposed no charges and consulted on no charges; no one has had an invoice involving a 1 per cent. increase, a 1,000 per cent. increase or any increase. At present the figures are pure guesstimates, and until the invoices arrive no one can be certain about the truth of the wild allegations made by the hon. Gentleman.

5. **Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): What assessment he has made of the level of enforcement and charging for meat inspection in other European Union countries. [80346]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): Information on the level of veterinary inspections in meat plants in other member states was placed in the Library of the House in November last year. Similar information about meat inspection charges will be deposited shortly—and I can reveal that "shortly" means later today.

Mr. Gill: I welcome last night's announcement by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about matters affecting inspection charges, and his announcement of an investigation of the dynamics of the abattoir industry; but is it not imperative for the Government to find hard evidence proving that other European Union countries are complying with the directives involved?

May I follow up a point that the Minister made to the Conservative spokesman about the provision of hard evidence? Does he accept the hard evidence—photographic evidence—that I showed Ministers last night, which proves that meat inspection standards simply are not being followed in other countries? Unless and until they are followed, it is grossly unfair for the British industry to go on being pilloried as it feels it is being pilloried now.

Mr. Rooker: I saw the photographs, but I cannot comment on the details. What I can say is that the information that will be placed in the Library later today—which we have obtained from our own sources abroad, through the embassies—tends to show, in regard to Meat Hygiene Service inspections as with veterinary inspections, that the arrangements for most member states

are in line with the relevant directive; but it is not possible to conclude from the information provided that all the rules are being followed. The information that we have obtained will, of course, be given to the European Commission.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Last night's announcement is particularly welcome to the farming community in Monmouthshire—especially to those in the small family abattoir in Raglan, run by Bill James, which I was invited to visit last year, where I was heavily lobbied and from which I felt mightily relieved to come away alive.

Mr. Rooker: I think that, by and large, that was a thank you for my right hon. Friend's announcement. Obviously more decisions must be announced about veterinary and meat inspection charges. Last night's decision related exclusively to the proposal for special risk material charges, which we have said will not be levied or collected during the current financial year.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): What the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said last night constituted a positive response to the representations of an industry that is under great pressure. Given the pressure that is being imposed on small and medium-sized abattoirs, will the Minister look again at the level of charges? It is spinning out of control, making small and medium-sized abattoirs uncompetitive. There is only one abattoir in my constituency—a large agricultural constituency—whose viability is now in question as a direct result of meat inspection charges. I urge the Minister to look again at the whole system.

Mr. Rooker: Yes, we look at the system continually, so that Ministers can make considered decisions and announcements. We are duty bound to collect the charges incurred by the Meat Hygiene Service. I completely reject the contention that matters are out of control.

However, I take the point. There are not that many abattoirs in Wales, although what will be the largest abattoir in Europe is under construction there, so the situation is bound to change. We have not yet announced the proposed charges, on which we are duty bound to consult. We will do that as quickly as possible.

Farm Diversification

7. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What steps his Department has taken to assist farmers to diversify their businesses. [80348]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): Funding to encourage a wide range of agricultural activities, including farm diversification, is available in the six areas designated under the English objective 5b structural fund programmes. The Ministry has also produced a series of advisory booklets on diversification.

Mr. Quinn: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. The work done under objective 5b is very welcome, especially in my area. However, changes in structural funding are on the way. I urge my hon. Friend to do everything in his power, when he talks to colleagues in both Whitehall and Europe, to make sure that the rural communities that rely so much on that help to diversify their business continue to get the assistance in the future. When objective 2 and the rural strand are under consideration, will he ensure that agricultural communities get their fair share of the money that is available?

Mr. Morley: I agree with my hon. Friend. Objective 5b has been a great success in supporting the rural economy, and in fostering partnership between the public and the private sector and between various rural organisations. I assure my hon. Friend that we are well aware of the need to take account of the needs of rural areas in the forthcoming changes to objective 2 funding.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister obtained a very good settlement in relation to the Rome agreement. It included objective 1 status for parts of this country, and safety nets for areas which, because of the changes, may lose their assisted area status. Regardless of the type of structural fund regime that is introduced, we want to ensure that it benefits as wide a rural area as possible.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Many sheep farmers in this country have diversified by developing their own export business. Last night, the Parliamentary Secretary repeated his view that live exports do not help sheep prices, yet in an answer on 5 March, the Minister of State said that

"it is likely that market prices would have been further depressed in the absence of competition from the live export trade."—[*Official Report*, 5 March 1999; Vol. 326, c. 947.]

Who is right?

Mr. Morley: When my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I met the directors of Farmers Ferry, they accepted that live exports, by themselves, had not increased the price of lamb. That is a fact of life. Their argument was that such exports put a floor to the price of lamb, and that that had stopped the price falling further. That is somewhat different.

The Government would prefer meat exports to be exports of meat rather than of live animals. We want value to be added in this country. The export of live animals means that jobs in our meat industry are exported too. That does not benefit the rural economy. We want there to be a strong export trade, because we have a good product to export. However, we want the benefits to go back to the rural economy through added value. That is good for welfare and for rural jobs.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): At a consultation meeting that I held recently in my constituency on the forthcoming rural White Paper, the overwhelming consensus was that more employment must be created in rural areas and that an important and desirable way to achieve that was to enable farmers to diversify into other businesses.

Does my hon. Friend agree that that would bring about a far more prosperous and sustainable countryside than the policies of the Conservative party, which are seemingly designed to freeze it in time?

Mr. Morley: I agree. There has been much diversification in rural areas, and it is the Government's policy to encourage and support it.

Food Standards Agency

8. **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): When the Government intend to respond to the report of the Food Standards Committee. [80349]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): We are considering the Committee's report on the Food Standards Agency Bill and we will respond to it, in line with its request, before Second Reading—of course, I am not in a position to say on what date that will be.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. Will he join me in congratulating the Committee on having uncovered the fact that the levy will rise from £90 to £600 after three years? Does he accept the unanimous verdict of the Committee that the flat-rate levy is contrary to natural justice?

What will the Minister do to counter the lack of proportionality? The four major supermarkets, which have a joint turnover of £40 billion a year, will pay £1 million in levy while all the other retailers, bed-and-breakfasts, corner shops, voluntary organisations, schools and charities will pay £300 million. Is not that unfair?

Mr. Rooker: On behalf of the Government, I am prepared to congratulate the Committee on producing a first-class report in a very short time. We find it of great assistance as part of the third stage of consultation on the Food Standards Agency.

The idea that the Committee uncovered anything is nonsense. The Committee asked me whether, if the Government collected all the costs of safeguarding food safety and food standards from the industry—and we have no intention of doing so—the levy would be not £90, but £600. The honest answer is yes, but as we propose to collect only £90, the taxpayer will pay the other £510 towards food safety surveillance and work. The idea that the industry is being asked to pay the majority of the cost is absolute nonsense.

We are consulting on the charge separately to the consultations on the draft Bill. We are actively looking at the alternatives that were put to us both before the consultation started and during the consultation. We have taken on board the views of the Select Committee on Agriculture. I cannot be more sincere than that. We seek an accommodation and a method of charging that is seen to be fair and acceptable to the industry and to the wider public.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Obviously the final part of the Minister's answer is welcome. I hope that all hon. Members will recognise that the Government are moving in response to what the Food Standards Committee has said, but may I ask the Minister to go a step further? Does he accept the major argument of the Committee that a flat-rate levy—a food poll tax just like the poll tax introduced by the Conservative party—is inappropriate, unfair and against natural justice?

Is the Minister prepared to say that that applies also to the proposed Meat Hygiene Service charges, which were also initially introduced by the previous Government? Again, it seems that a flat-rate levy is to be imposed, rather than one that relates to headage.

Mr. Rooker: I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Meat Hygiene Service. There is no comparison between the charging system for the Meat Hygiene Service and the proposed levy for the Food Standards Agency.

As I said to the Select Committee when I appeared before it over five hours, some new money must be raised, otherwise there will be no Food Standards Agency. The question is how we collect that extra money—it is currently estimated that the total required will be less than £50 million at £41 million—as cheaply and as practically as possible without creating an army of bureaucrats. The intention, as expressed in a separate consultation paper, is to use that money fairly for food safety.

I have made it clear to the Select Committee and to anyone who has asked outside that we are considering the alternatives and, as I have said, the Government considered such alternatives before we published our paper. I even offered my own alternatives. There is no magic solution to the issue. We have to find one that is fair and perceived to be fair and acceptable to the industry and to the wider public. We do not want to spoil what will be one of the Government's most popular policies for a ha'p'orth of tar on the Food Standards Agency's charging system.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Is my hon. Friend aware of the universal praise for the Government's decision to use the pre-legislative inquiry process on the FSA? As someone who is heavily involved in the other pre-legislative inquiry into the other FSA—the Financial Services Authority—may I say that such an approach to legislation, with high-level consultation and scrutiny of a Bill before it is considered in Standing Committee, is universally admired. It is the way in which legislation should be introduced. Such an approach will also ensure that the respective legislation receives much broader support across the food and financial services industries. Is it not the fact that, for years, the previous Government imposed bad legislation on us and that, now that we have introduced this new procedure, the Conservatives do not like it?

Mr. Rooker: In my 25 years' experience in the House, any fair assessment of the quality of our past legislative output—using industry's techniques to measure quality of output and performance—would classify it as abysmal. We are trying to modernise the processes of creating laws, to ensure quality for the British people. A draft Bill, with draft notes on clauses, was considered not only by a special Select Committee but subject to regional consultation. That was the third stage of consultation on that Bill—publication of the James report was the first stage, and the White Paper was the second. We have also received more than 1,000 submissions on the Bill.

It would be preposterous to say that, having gone through that process, the Food Standards Agency will be a surprise to anyone in the United Kingdom. We intend to produce a quality organisation, to provide a quality service to the British people.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Does the Minister understand that if he is not able to announce before the Bill's Second Reading the scrapping of that monstrous flat-rate charge and explain what will replace it, the Government's consultation exercise will be exposed as a farce? That charge will inflict a massive blow on

thousands of small businesses, and irreparable damage will be done to many rural communities, where the village shop is an absolute cornerstone of life.

Mr. Rooker: I realise that the idea of charging registered food premises the sum of £1.73 a week is very onerous to many such businesses—*[Interruption.]* I am making a statement; perhaps, when I spell out the charge—£1.73 a week—it does not have the right ring about it. Nevertheless, as I have said more than once, we intend to make our proposals and to reply to the Food Standards Committee before the Bill's Second Reading.

9. **Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): If he will make a statement on progress with the establishment of a Food Standards Agency. [80351]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): I obviously cannot be precise on the matter. However, we have received a large response to the public consultation, and shall introduce the Bill in this Session if time is available. Everyone understands the position that the Government are in, as we have made it absolutely clear. One of the reasons why we had a short consultation period, and why the special Select Committee had a short time to consider the Food Standards Agency Bill, is that—depending on progress in reform of the other place—we shall seek an early legislative slot, before the end of this Session, for the Bill's Second Reading and Royal Assent.

Mr. Gapes: I welcome that answer, and tell my hon. Friend that many hon. Members are delighted at the way in which in less than two years, the Government—the Ministry and the Department of Health—have worked to restore public confidence in food in the United Kingdom. However, may I ask him please to talk to his colleagues in Government, to ensure that the Bill is introduced as soon as possible so that that process may continue?

Mr. Rooker: Yes. We have talked to colleagues in Government throughout the process, but, as I said in my initial answer, colleagues in the other place who are not part of the Government have the matter in their hands. We are dependent largely on the time that the other place takes to decide on its own reform. Nevertheless, as we have made it abundantly clear, progress on the matter is not being hindered because we lack a Bill. Since September 1997, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food no longer has total control over United Kingdom food standards and safety. The setting up of the Joint Food Standards and Safety Group was important, as it provided a unified management structure across two Departments—the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. As time goes on, we will build on that development. The premises that the group will move into—as we announced in March—are being converted, so the practicalities of the work will progress.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Does the Minister understand that he would make rapid and consensual progress with the establishment of the Food Standards Agency if he abandoned his plans for the poll tax on food, to which the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) has referred? I can take the Minister to village shops in my constituency which have already taken the decision to stop selling food. They make little money on it, and they fear a hike in charges. Does he understand the fear of farmers in my constituency who, perhaps, run bed-and-breakfasts, and farm food shops and attend farmers' markets, and who thus may be eligible not once, but three times for that charge? Does he understand that the progress of the Bill and the agency would be smoother if he abandoned the charging proposal?

Mr. Rooker: I understand the hon. Gentlemen's points, and it would be quite ludicrous if market traders were charged more than one sum for visiting different markets. I openly accept that such issues have been raised during the consultation. Without the required extra money, there will be no Food Standards Agency. We still have to find a way of raising the sufficient sum, which will, as I have said, at maximum, be £50 million—our current estimate is about £41 million. I understand that progress on reaching a decision could be considerably improved, but, as I said to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), we will make our decisions known—particularly our views on the recommendations of the special Select Committee—before Second Reading so that the House is fully aware of the proposals.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

The Attorney-General was asked—

Crown Prosecution Service

28. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What recent representations he has received about the efficiency of the CPS. [80373]

The Solicitor-General (Mr. Ross Cranston): There is a continuing interest in the restructuring of the Crown Prosecution Service. The Attorney-General and I regularly receive inquiries from people—including hon. Members—about the service. The Glidewell report on the CPS made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency of the service. Additionally, the Government decided to restructure the CPS into 42 geographical areas to improve efficiency and accountability. The CPS is making good progress in considering and implementing the recommendations. Additionally, recently, the new 42 chief Crown prosecutors were appointed to take forward the changes.

Mr. Amess: Although I readily accept that there is much praise for the work of the Crown Prosecution Service from certain quarters, is the Solicitor-General aware that an increasing number of my constituents are complaining about the time that the CPS is taking to examine cases? In addition, there is no information as to how investigations are proceeding. Is the Solicitor-General prepared to say that when many of the cases are ultimately dropped, justice is being sacrificed because Her Majesty's Government simply are not putting enough money into the staffing of the bureaucracy that is necessary to deliver the services offered by the CPS?

The Solicitor-General: On the whole, cases moves quickly through the CPS. However, the hon. Gentleman

has a valid point in relation to the handling of victims and the relations of victims. Sir Iain Glidewell made a specific recommendation about that—one of a handful of recommendations on which we have not yet reached a final decision. We have accepted the principle that the matter must be dealt with much more thoroughly.

The Government's paper "Speaking up for Justice" contains a number of recommendations about how victims, relatives of victims and witnesses should be better informed. The legislative aspects of that are being taken forward in the Access to Justice Bill.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): The new chief Crown prosecutor for the Staffordshire office has introduced himself to me, and I look forward to meeting him to discuss the work of his office. Now that we have the aligned boundaries between the CPS and the police, can the Solicitor-General tell me what improvements in performance my constituents and I can expect?

The Solicitor-General: All hon. Members should have received letters from chief Crown prosecutors in their area, and I would encourage them to make contact with them. CCPs now have greater autonomy in their areas. In addition, the areas are coterminous with the police authorities, so there should be more efficient operation of both the CPS and the police.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): We, too, welcome the 42 new chief Crown prosecutors. Does the Solicitor-General recognise that the business of putting them in post has taken almost twice as long as was first announced in May 1997, when the Attorney-General came to office?

Is there not a further example of the sluggishness that affects so many Departments in what is happening with electronic mail? I saw successful e-mail pilots in Ipswich three years ago. The new strategic plan for the criminal justice system proudly mentions that Stockport is the first police force to have such a pilot and that it is hoped in due course to have pilots working between courts, the CPS and the police. As we had successful pilots so long ago, is not that yet another example of sluggishness, as opposed to the Government's hype? When will all CPS areas be in e-mail contact with their courts and police stations, which is not a very complicated matter?

The Solicitor-General: We have been in power for less than two years. We have acted quickly. The right hon. and learned Gentleman was in office for a long time. As soon as we took office we appointed Sir Iain Glidewell to review the CPS. It was only proper that he should consider it carefully, and his report has been widely commended. We are now acting on it. As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) a moment ago, a decision has been reached on all but a handful of the recommendations.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about the use of electronic sources to further efficiency. That is being implemented. He has seen the operation of e-mail pilots in Stockport; I have seen it in Durham, and I know that it exists in other places as well.

Government Legal Work

29. **Mr. David Lock** (Wyre Forest): What steps he is taking regarding the appointment of counsel to undertake civil law work for the Government. [80374]

The Solicitor-General (Mr. Ross Cranston): Following the implementation of his new appointment procedures, in accordance with which the vacancies are widely advertised, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has recently appointed 48 junior counsel to the Crown C panel. An advertisement inviting applications for the London A and B panels was placed last month, and he will make new appointments to those panels in the summer. Appointments to the provincial panel are expected before the end of the year.

Mr. Lock: I declare an interest as a former practising barrister who is still a door tenant in chambers, although my duties in the House and to my constituents prevent my practising. Does my hon. and learned Friend recognise the advances that have been made in the legal world, and especially in the Bar outside London, in the past 15 years? Will he ensure that the new openness, which is extremely welcome, will be reflected in the appointment of more barristers to do Government legal work outside the Inns of Court and the hallowed Temple, who live perhaps more in the real world, in Birmingham, Manchester or Leeds?

The Solicitor-General: It is a pity that my hon. Friend was not able to apply for a position on the panel. The new procedure attracted a large number of exceptionally good applicants, and we have made some very good appointment. It was important to open up the procedure and make it transparent.

My hon. Friend makes a valid point about the appointments of counsel in the provinces. As I said, we are in the process of advertising for that panel as well.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Can the Solicitor-General confirm that all appointments of counsel to undertake civil law work for the Government are determined strictly by market testing, overseen by officials, and that, beyond giving the formal seal of approval or imprimatur to the winners, there is no other ministerial involvement?

The Solicitor-General: I can certainly give that assurance. The decisions were made by a panel appointed by the Attorney-General, but neither he nor I had any involvement in the process.

Acquittals

30. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): If he will ensure that debriefing sessions take place between the CPS and the barristers it instructs following acquittals where the pre–trial assessment by the CPS pointed to a high likelihood of conviction. [80376]

The Solicitor-General (Mr. Ross Cranston): Such cases should always be considered carefully so that the reasons for the acquittal can be established. In some cases the reasons are clear. Where they are not, the Crown Prosecution Service is sympathetic to holding such

meetings. The CPS routinely conducts an analysis of all acquittals in the Crown court. A report is prepared by the caseworker who has attended court with counsel, and the report is subsequently discussed with the police. In such circumstances, debriefing sessions with counsel are arranged in order to discuss the issues that have arisen.

Mr. Prentice: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that answer, but debriefing sessions should happen as a matter of course when a case comes to court and the police, the CPS and everyone else have a clear expectation that the jury will bring in a verdict of guilty. The Solicitor-General knows of the case of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, whose son Lee was killed in a road accident in Staffordshire in 1997. Seven young men were packed into a car that went whizzing down the motorway at 120 mph. The driver was inexplicably found not guilty by the jury. My constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, cannot fathom why the CPS in Stafford did not hold a debriefing session with the prosecuting counsel. If that were done as a matter of course, it would inform research into why juries bring in the verdicts that they do.

The Solicitor-General: I am aware of the very sad case to which my hon. Friend referred. Juries sometimes come to inexplicable conclusions, as anyone who has been involved with jury trials knows. That does not mean that the jury was wrong, or that it was wrong for the CPS to bring the case. It is simply the nature of the process. Juries can come to unexpected conclusions.

There is a good case for debriefing on a regular basis. The CPS has entered into discussions with the Bar Council about how that can be done routinely so as to provide key information to the people involved.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I support the comments of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), especially with regard to the quality of the prosecution barristers. A constituent of mine who was a witness in a case feels that she was ripped apart with irrelevant questions about her personal life when she was giving evidence against someone. She was not defended by the prosecution lawyer, and the case was subsequently lost. The quality of the people employed seems to be appalling. What does the Solicitor-General intend to do about it?

The Solicitor-General: I am not aware of the case that the hon. Gentleman has raised. If he writes to me, I shall look into it. The CPS receives reports of adverse performance by particular counsel, as a result of which such counsel might not be briefed in the future. Both the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) have raised a serious matter, and I shall look into it.

Hamilton *v.* Al Fayed

31. **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): If he will make a statement on the cost of the intervention in the Hamilton *v.* Al Fayed case in the Court of Appeal on behalf of the House of Commons. [80377]

The Solicitor-General (Mr. Ross Cranston): Treasury Counsel's fees and the costs of the Treasury Solicitors Department in that case came to a combined total of £13,451.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): £13,000?

The Solicitor-General: That did not involve any fee on my part.

Mr. Chope: We are grateful to the Solicitor-General for not having charged an additional fee for his appearance. Does he accept the verdict in the Court of Appeal? What steps are being taken to recover the wasted costs from Mr. Al Fayed, at whose suggestion that intervention was made?

The Solicitor-General: We entered as a neutral party. That was accepted in the Court of Appeal decision. We were not taking sides on behalf of Mr. Hamilton or on behalf of the defendant. We were putting the important arguments raised with us by the House authorities on the parliamentary privilege point. The Court of Appeal accepted the important point that we made about the courts respecting the procedures of the House. You, Madam Speaker, were intimately concerned in this matter. At the end of the day we did not appeal because we thought that the Court of Appeal had got it right. It did not accept all our arguments—in particular our argument about the exclusive jurisdiction of the House over the conduct of Members. On the whole we were satisfied with the way in which the Court of Appeal said that the trial judge had been wrong about querying the procedures of the House.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The business will be as follows:

MONDAY 26 APRIL—There will be a debate on defence equipment on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 27 APRIL—Progress on consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 28 APRIL—Until 2 o'clock there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

THURSDAY 29 APRIL—Opposition Day [10th Allotted Day].

Until about 4 o'clock there will be a debate on the Government's policies on housing and the green belt. Followed by a debate entitled Job Losses, Industrial Collapse and the Failure of the New Deal. Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

FRIDAY 30 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 3 MAY—Bank holiday.

TUESDAY 4 MAY—Until about midnight, progress on remaining stages of the Greater London Authority Bill.

WEDNESDAY 5 MAY—Until 2 o'clock there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Conclusion of remaining stages of the Greater London Authority Bill.

THURSDAY 6 MAY—Debate on modernising London's health service on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 7 MAY—Private Members' Bills.

Sir George Young: The House is grateful for next week's business and an indication of the business for the following week. Will the Leader of the House confirm what she said last Thursday, namely that the Prime Minister will make a statement on Monday on the NATO summit and the situation in Kosovo? As all options are being kept under review, will the House be regularly updated thereafter, not least if the position changes on the use of ground troops?

On the backlog of promised debates, I must press the Leader of the House for the debate on the reform of the House of Lords. The Bill is making progress in another place. It is some considerable time since the White Paper was published, and the debate would now be informed by my party's publication of the Mackay commission report. Can the right hon. Lady try hard to find time for this debate in the near future? I note in passing that the upper House has found time for a debate on the national changeover plan for the euro, whereas we have not.

Can the Leader of the House confirm also that she has not lost sight of the usual debate on policing in London? Can the Government find time next week to explain the muddle that they have got into on the working time directive? This commitment, which the Government signed us up to, is apparently being broken by the national health service, with technicians at the Royal Victoria infirmary Newcastle taking the trust to an employment tribunal. Despite the extra money for the NHS, is it the case that it does not have the resources to observe this directive?

Finally, can the House now be given the dates of the Whitsun recess so that Members and staff can plan their diaries?

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, I can confirm that the Prime Minister will make a statement on Monday following the NATO summit. I have little doubt but that he will take the opportunity to update the House on affairs in Kosovo and that either he or others will continue to keep the House up to date with events, as we have done throughout.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the backlog of promised debates, but what we have is a backlog of debates that he has asked for and which I have agreed should be considered. We will try to find time for them when we can. Of these, the debate on the reform of the House of Lords is one that we hope for which to find time in the reasonably near future. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that, as I said last week, there is a creative tension between the desire of the House for continuing debate and update on issues such as Kosovo, and the many other matters that the House would wish to debate.

The right hon. Gentleman asked why we do not have a debate on the changeover plan. The Lords debated that, but its agenda is in its own hands. He asks the Government to provide time for a debate on a subject on which the Conservative party could engage in debate were it to join the committee that the Government have set up. He also asked for the usual debate on policing in London. I have not lost sight of that.

It surprises me when Conservative Members raise the working time directive because they were in government when it went through in the European Union. Indeed, the Conservative party, having not voted against it, made a clumsy and expensive effort—that anyone could have told it would be unsuccessful—to take the matter to court. If it had proceeded sensibly and properly with good government and followed through consistently its stance in Committee on the matter, no one would be in any difficulty—the directive would have been in place and we would have had proper experience of how it worked long ago.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Will my right hon. Friend encourage a clear Government statement next week on our policy towards Kosovo refugees? When I was in the camps in Macedonia last week, refugees told me that they had put down to go to Norway and Germany. Both would have preferred to come to Britain but had been told that Britain did not want them. I do not know whether that was true but I found it worrying. So far, we have been told that only 250 Kosovar refugees are coming to this country. I have had several phone calls from members of the public who believe that we should be far more generous and are willing to offer accommodation. I think that that is the will of the people of Britain. They want

us to throw our arms open to refugees, who through no fault of their own cannot stay in their homes and will not be able to return to them in the foreseeable future.

Mrs. Beckett: As my hon. Friend says, there is much sympathy in the House and across the country for people in that terrible position. She knows that the Government have had a couple of approaches from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on behalf of families in particularly difficult circumstances, and that we are giving much support, faster and more efficiently than many others, to help people to survive in the area of Kosovo. There may be some individuals who want to come to this country or others, but the great bulk of those who are, sadly, refugees continue to express the view that they want to go back to their homes in Kosovo. We are anxious to do what most of the refugee effort is geared to doing: giving people all the help and support that we can now and maintaining them in that area so that they can more readily return to their homes as that becomes possible.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): We endorse the plea for clarification of the Government's policy on Kosovar refugees. The Leader of the House has promised some debates rather than merely having had them requested of her. First, on the second report of the Modernisation Committee, which she chairs, she well knows that there is a narrow opportunity for the House to debate the issue so that it can take a decision and arrange the necessary works in time for the start of the autumn Session.

On an issue equally important in terms of the need for decision, the Leader of the House knows of my long-standing concern about the proposal to charge our constituents to use the line of route through the House in the summer. I understand that if we are to dispose of the matter speedily and effectively, we need a debate in the House as soon as possible, and she has promised one.

Can the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to make an urgent statement on NHS dentistry next week? She will have seen the report in *The Independent* today, based on an analysis by the British Dental Association, that NHS dentistry is close to collapse and that the number of NHS patients has dropped by 5 million since the previous Government altered contract arrangements in 1992. All parts of the country are affected by the collapse in a service that I fear we all have taken for granted. In Cornwall there is a particularly difficult situation, to which the report refers. Does the Leader of the House recognise that people throughout the country feel that they have contributed to the NHS through their national insurance contributions all their lives and that they simply are not getting the service for which they have paid?

Mrs. Beckett: First, may I take this opportunity to meet an unanswered request from the official Opposition for recess dates. I cannot give them yet. I will give them as soon as I possibly can.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) asked for clarification on the Kosovo refugees. We have made plain our approach to the treatment of the refugees, and we will continue to keep the House updated and informed on the matter.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we have undertaken to give time for a debate on the report of the Modernisation Committee. I was a little surprised to hear negative noises from the Benches immediately opposite me, as there is a continual call from Conservative Members for further opportunities for scrutiny of what the Government are doing. That is precisely what it is intended to propose.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall also asked for a debate on charging for the line of route. We intend that any decision on charging anyone for access to this place—say, during the summer recess—should be properly considered, debated and taken by the House as a whole.

I can assure him that we are also conscious of the problems that we inherited in the NHS dental service. The Government have published a couple of documents—"Investing in Dentistry" and "Personal Dental Services". We have consulted widely and we expect soon to publish a new strategy for NHS dentistry.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask the Leader of the House a question of which I gave her office notice this morning? During the debate on defence equipment on Monday, will a statement be made on what knowledge is available on the pollution effects of the military action on the Danube—whether pollution is going down river to Hungary and Romania—on the effect of attacks on chemical plants, on chlorine-related problems, on any disease that is likely to arise and, not least, on whether depleted uranium shells are being used? If that is the case, some assessment really ought to be given in Monday's debate to the effect on health and whether the situation will resemble that in southern Iraq. Those are matters of fact that the House of Commons deserves to know about.

Mrs. Beckett: I entirely share my hon. Friend's view that matters of fact are matters about which the House of Commons should know. He will recognise that the difficulty is that those facts are not always available to us. I undertake to draw his request to the attention of my hon. Friends who will lead for the Government in the debate. I have no doubt that if they have information which will answer some of the questions that my hon. Friend raises, they will do their utmost to make it available to the House. I merely caution my hon. Friend that in view of the action that is taking place, sound information such as he requests is not necessarily widely available.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May we please have an urgent debate which will allow the Public Accounts Committee, on its return from its investigations in Brussels, to report urgently to the House its findings with regard to sleaze and corruption in Brussels? Such a debate would perhaps allow the Prime Minister himself to comment on whether he has confidence in his protegé Mr. Prodi to sort out the sleaze and corruption, given the suspicion in some quarters that a group of Italian gentlemen close to and appointed by that gentleman are the least likely people to sort out sleaze and corruption in Brussels, never mind anywhere else.

Mrs. Beckett: Mr. Prodi has no relationship with or responsibility for the matters to which the right hon. Gentleman has drawn attention. He was the appointee of the previous Prime Minister, although I do not hold him responsible for that. I merely say that if we are going to point fingers all over the place, they do not point over here. One of the reasons why Mr. Prodi was supported not only by this Government but unanimously by all

[Mrs. Beckett]

member states of the European Union is the perception that he has a record of improvement and efficiency in Italy.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will my right hon. Friend give the House some time, between 6 May and the date when we rise for the Whitsun recess, to debate the regional development agencies and the next steps towards regional government in England?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot undertake to do so at present, especially within the short time scale suggested by my hon. Friend, but I shall bear in mind his keen interest in that matter.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Most hon. Members are aware that, from time to time, we hear more in the newspapers than in the House about prospective Government business. Newspapers have been leading with statements to the effect that the Government are to introduce, as a matter of urgency, a Bill to deal with the disappeared in Northern Ireland. Can the Leader of the House give us any information as to the timing of such a Bill? Can we have an assurance that the Government will not allow the terrorist organisations to continue playing ducks and drakes, especially in the way that such organisations put pressure on the families of the disappeared to prevent publicity and post mortem examination? If there is to be immunity under that measure, may there also be immunity for those called to give evidence in the inquiry into Londonderry that was recently set up?

Mrs. Beckett: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that I have not seen the reports to which he refers—I am sorry about that. I shall certainly draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; I am sure that she will understand the point that he makes.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Has the Leader of the House studied *Hansard* for Monday of this week? If so, did she notice that, although all the major parties support the general policy that the Government have adopted towards Yugoslavia, there was a great deal of support—it was more than sympathy—expressed by the Opposition and the Liberal Democrat spokesman for the idea that Parliament should have the opportunity to register its opinion on a substantive motion? I say that because I seek an assurance from the Leader of the House that, were any decision taken to commit ground troops, which would represent a complete change from the original policy, the House would receive a motion seeking support for that so that we could debate, divide and decide it. We should then avoid the fiasco of Monday, when 13 Members expressed a view on the Adjournment of the House, but the House itself had no opportunity to register its opinion on the nature, objectives and character of the policy being pursued.

Mrs. Beckett: My right hon. Friend has raised that matter in a variety of ways on several occasions. He continues to press his point of view, as he has every right to do. As I have told him before, although I well understand the express wish of Members on both sides of the House for a decision-making procedure of the type that he describes and suggests, there is no precedent for that in the House. I cannot give him the assurance he seeks that the Government intend to break that practice, which was adopted for extremely good reasons.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Since my question last week, has the Leader of the House had time to discuss with the Minister for the Cabinet Office the desirability of debating the national drugs strategy, following the publication of the first annual report of the United Kingdom anti-drugs co-ordinator, so that Members can discuss those vital issues, which affect almost every community in the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Beckett: I have considered the matter and the request made by the hon. Lady. The matter will be discussed through the usual channels. However, the hon. Lady will be aware—as are all hon. Members—of the great pressure on the business of the House at present.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Further to the point made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) about what is becoming a crisis for national health service dentistry, is my right hon. Friend aware that many Labour Members share those concerns? For example, until recently, about 60,000 people in my constituency had no access to a full NHS dentistry service on which they could rely. Will she convey those concerns to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, and find time for Members to debate what has become an extremely urgent and important issue?

Mrs. Beckett: I recognise the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed today and on previous occasions on behalf of his constituents, but all I can say is that we intend to publish proposals in the not-too-distant future, and perhaps at that time it will be possible to air the issues in the House. I understand the depth of concern felt in every constituency, in every part of the country, about the lack of service available. I heard the shadow Chancellor talking on the radio the other morning, about how the Conservative party had always said that the NHS was safe in its hands, but one of the best examples of how it was not is NHS dentistry.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Can we have a statement next week on the plight of those British businesses that are the innocent victims of the trade sanctions resulting from the European Union's illegal banana regime? The Government were quick to offer £40 million in compensation to the Scottish cashmere industry and to exclude Scottish biscuits from the list of firms that were subject to sanctions, but it appears that, if the firms are based in England, the Government are not quite so sympathetic. May we have an urgent statement on that subject next week?

May we also have a statement to clarify a doubt that has now arisen in the minds of many sub-postmasters in this country, many of whom are paid only £2.10 per hour for a 38-hour week by the Post Office? It would appear that, under the minimum wage legislation, they are entitled to a substantial pay rise.

Mrs. Beckett: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his ingenuity in working the national minimum wage into a

question about bananas. It is nonsense to suggest that there is some discrimination in the way in which the Government have handled the concerns of businesses throughout the country that have been affected by that trade dispute. I am slightly surprised, and perhaps even a little disappointed, that the hon. Gentleman is apparently so unsupportive of the concerns of Caribbean banana producers, on whose behalf this country, under Governments of both political colours, has sought to act for so long—perhaps that is new conservatism. I shall draw the issues he raises in respect of the Post Office to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to an earlier answer, will my right hon. Friend reconsider the position on a vote on the military action against Serbia, bearing it in mind that, if such a vote were to take place, there would undoubtedly be an overwhelming majority in favour of dealing with ethnic cleansing, mass murder and rapes in Europe? *[Interruption.]* Does my right hon. Friend accept that it would be useful—

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Wait until the body bags come back.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Winnick: Regardless of the interruptions, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be extremely useful if there were a debate in the Belgrade Parliament, in which critics were able to express their point of view without fearing for their very lives? That is the difference between the dictatorship whose crimes we are currently combating and own free and democratic Parliament.

Mrs. Beckett: I understand my hon. Friend's final point about how unfortunate it is that the sort of free debate and freely expressed differences of view that we, quite rightly, hear in the House are unlikely to be heard in the Serbian Parliament, not least because, in many cases, the information that might fuel such opinions is denied. I also understand the desire he expresses on behalf of those of us who, despite recognising the difficulties and concerns arising from such action, would like an opportunity to register our support for those who carry the burden of responsibility in dealing with that extremely difficult situation. However, I remain of the view that, attractive though such a proposal is for those reasons, it is not appropriate to change the precedent in the House at this time.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will the Leader of the House discuss with the House authorities whether it might be possible to arrange for those who work in this place—Members of Parliament and their staff, and all those who work elsewhere in the House of Commons—to have the opportunity to give money to aid the Kosovo refugees, whose plight is simply unbelievable and grows more awful with every passing day? Will she ask the relevant authority whether it would be possible to put collecting tins in the Bars and Cafeterias and other places where people gather, so that the House and all those who work here can make their contributions?

Madam Speaker: Order. That is hardly a matter for the Leader of the House at Business Questions. However, as I am sympathetic to the point of view expressed by the hon. Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Soames), I shall allow the Leader of the House to respond.

Mrs. Beckett: I am very grateful, Madam Speaker. I think many in the House would welcome that suggestion. As the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) will be aware, despite a tendency in the press to notice only Members of Parliament and to divide expenditure on the House only by our number, some 9,000 to 10,000 people work in and around the Palace of Westminster. It may be that many of them would welcome the opportunity to make such a contribution. As you said, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is not seeking a debate on this matter, but I think the whole House will welcome his suggestion.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I refer the Leader of the House to her reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) concerning refugee policy and treatment. We all obviously want people to have the right to access this country as asylum seekers. Will the Government clarify, by way of a statement or a debate, their policy regarding asylum seekers coming to this country? As I understand it, present Kosovo refugees will be granted automatic entry to the United Kingdom—I have no complaints about that—but those who arrived earlier did not receive automatic entry. Many of them have been denied both access to any benefits and the right to work in this country and must sustain themselves with food parcels handed out by local government. If a substantial number of asylum seekers arrive in this country—and, as I said, I have no problem with that—it is essential that local authorities from inner-city areas where many asylum seekers are likely to go receive sufficient funding to deal with their social services, health, education and recreational needs so that those asylum seekers may live a decent life in this country for as long as they wish to remain. The Government must clarify their position towards local authorities that will be expected to deal with the problem when those unfortunate people arrive.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend may have noticed that it is Home Office questions on Monday, and he may have an opportunity to put his questions directly to the Home Secretary, who is responsible for handling some of those asylum applications. Some 120 Kosovar refugees—mainly women and children—are expected to arrive in this country in the next few days. The Government also anticipate a further request from UNHCR to accept 18 medical cases with 121 dependants between them. My hon. Friend will therefore appreciate that they are quite specific cases forwarded by the refugee organisations for specific reasons: those people need care and treatment which can be provided in this country. For that reason, our approach is different from that which we take to refugees generally when we seek to sustain them in a region. My hon. Friend asked several other questions about local authority problems and, as I said, he should seek to raise them with my right hon. Friend at Question Time.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Has the Leader of the House had a chance to read yesterday's article in the *Financial Times* about the annual report of the International Institute for Management Development,

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

which is based in Lausanne? It revealed that, embarrassingly, Britain has fallen three points on the international competitiveness league table and is now 15th, behind countries such as Sweden and Australia. Will the Leader of the House find time to debate that subject so that we may point to the Government's economic management failures in the past year?

Mrs. Beckett: I have not seen the particular story to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but I am aware that international surveys and league tables are of varying reliability and produce varying results. I recall vividly the fact that the United Kingdom ranked below Sweden and Australia in many competitiveness surveys produced under the previous Government.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I refer the Leader of the House to early-day motion 572:

[*That this House believes that the artefacts of the previous Welsh Parliament should be returned to Wales; recalls that the Pennal Letter and Seal of Owain Glyndwr sent to France in 1404 are of great historical significance in Wales as rare treasures of Welsh history; and believes that they should be reclaimed from the French National Library and exhibited and honoured in Wales as tangible links between the Parliament of 1404 and of the Assembly of today.*]

The Leader of the House will appreciate the difficulty that I have in convincing her that we must debate urgently an event that took place in 1406. In that year, the last Welsh Parliament sent certain artefacts—the Pennal letter and the Great Seal of Owain Glyndwr—to the French king. They are now housed in the national library in Paris and, while they are of no significance—a mere footnote—to French history, they are the only tangible link between the last Welsh Parliament and the new Assembly to be established next month. Would it not be marvellous if we could reclaim those treasures?

Mrs. Beckett: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I freely confess that I was not aware that those interesting historical artefacts were held by the French. I am uncertain whether the French Government would readily release those objects, and I am conscious that the British Government are frequently petitioned to release historical documents and artefacts that were brought to this country. However, I shall draw my hon. Friend's request to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales who, I am sure, despite his pressing concerns with important elections in Wales, will do his utmost to explore the matter.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Does the Leader of the House share my concern about the woeful performance of some of her colleagues in responding to questions tabled for answer on a named day with substantive answers on that named day? I note from her reply to my question on that matter that her Department manages to answer a perfectly reasonable 85 per cent. of questions on the named day, but the Treasury manages only 32 per cent. and the Department of Trade and Industry only 31 per cent.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, when I asked a named-day question, said that it would give me a reply as soon as possible, and that was borne out by the eventual substantive reply stating that it managed to answer only 26 per cent. of questions on the named day. Does the right hon. Lady agree that those figures are unacceptable? Will she find an opportunity for those of her colleagues whose performance in this matter falls below her own to explain to the House how they intend to improve it?

Mrs. Beckett: Although I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about my Department, I point out that we have a lighter administrative work load than the Departments of some of my colleagues. I have mixed feelings on the matter. Of course the House must have proper and prompt replies to Members' questions. However, I confess to the House—perhaps I should not—that when I was in opposition, I never gave any thought to the realism of the day that I named in my questions. I merely bunged down the date on which I wanted an answer to my most urgent question. I suspect that most Members do the same—it is perfectly reasonable that they should.

The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that some questions are of considerable complexity and it may take time for Ministers to answer them as accurately and fully as they can. I understand his concern, but delays are understandable, particularly for Departments that have a heavy work load and where accuracy is essential, such as the Treasury and the DTI. If the hon. Gentleman wants to hold Ministers to account for the delivery of their answers, all I can suggest is that when he tables questions he might give a little more thought to how long it may take to answer them. I would not blame him if he did not, because I never did.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I recognise that security matters are not usually debated on the Floor of the House, but will my right hon. Friend find time to discuss the grave allegations in the editorial of the Scottish National party's monthly newsletter that MI5 has infiltrated the SNP with agents provocateurs to cause damage and discredit to the party? Before dismissing those allegations as the fantasies of the James Bond party, we should consider the very real evidence that the SNP is being undermined from within, if only by its leader, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Mrs. Beckett: I freely confess to my hon. Friend that I was not familiar with that concern. I should have thought that the SNP was only too grateful to get new members—but as an excuse for poor performance, its ingenuity makes one gasp.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Has the Leader of the House yet studied, and can we have an early debate on, early-day motion 560:

[*That this House reasserts the importance of maintaining the integrity and political impartiality of the BBC; recognises the contribution made by Mr. Greg Dyke to the broadcasting industry; believes, however, that his substantial financial donations to the Labour Party render him inappropriate to be the next Director General of the BBC; and is confident that, in making this appointment, the BBC Governors will be conscious of the need to avoid accusations of political bias or cronyism.*]

It was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) and concerns the appointment of the next Director-General of the BBC.

Moreover, is the right hon. Lady aware of the widespread opinion within the House and outside that in the name of retaining the BBC's integrity and impartiality, Mr. Greg Dyke, notwithstanding his significant contribution to British broadcasting, would be a most unsuitable occupant of that high office, in view of his substantial financial donations over time to the Labour party? Does the right hon. Lady agree that to avoid charges of bias and cronyism and to retain public confidence, the BBC governors should properly take that widespread concern into account in making their judgment?

Mrs. Beckett: First, I remind the hon. Gentleman of where he ended up—that it is not the Government but the BBC board of governors that makes this appointment.

As for the notion that anyone who has ever given money to the Labour party should be debarred from holding public office, I can only say that if such a principle had applied during the period of office of the previous Government, the public service would have been denuded of many appointments.

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford): Could my right hon. Friend find time for an urgent debate on public transport, particularly in inner-city areas? In Salford last week, First Bus, a major bus company, withdrew services unilaterally, leaving pensioners and working people stranded at bus stops. The alleged reason was attacks by young people on buses. Clearly it is important that buses and drivers must be protected, but in inner-city areas very few people have access to private transport—so keeping the buses running is crucial to the well-being of such communities. I ask my right hon. Friend to consider that.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I am sorry to learn of the difficulties that her constituents experienced. On Tuesday, there will be tabling of Department of Trade and Industry questions. I have no doubt that through that and other ways my hon. Friend will find an opportunity to raise the matter. I fear that I cannot promise her an early debate.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 562:

[*That this House notes the issuing of Health Service Circular 1999/999 on the multiple sclerosis drug Beta Interferon; believes that this circular represents a further withdrawal from the Government's pledge of universal care for those that need it; finds the circular pre-empts proper consideration by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence; and opposes any further moves to ration drugs available on the NHS on grounds of cost rather than clinical effectiveness.*]

The motion relates to the provision of beta interferon for the treatment and alleviation of multiple sclerosis. The Government have just issued new guidance to health authorities on the rationing of this drug. Why is it that we have not yet had a statement from the Secretary of State for Health, explaining why he has issued fresh guidance that has pre-empted the work of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which was meant to be giving guidance to health authorities so that they could take real decisions about the clinical effectiveness of beta interferon—rather than the Government, as it seems, dictating that decisions should be based upon cost-effectiveness, not clinical effectiveness? May we have a statement?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is a little ahead of himself. He says that the Department of Health has issued guidance. My understanding is that it has not. It may well be that someone has leaked a draft. Sadly, these things happen from time to time. I can only say that, as I understand it, a draft for guidance is being prepared. There have been some concerns about how it might be interpreted and the Department of Health is giving further consideration to how it might be clarified to meet those concerns. It has deferred issuing any guidance in the meantime, but it hopes to do so as soon as possible. If the hon. Gentleman still has concerns about the matter when he has seen the actual guidance, he will no doubt try to raise the matter again.

Angela Smith (Basildon): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 566:

[*That this House welcomes the Government's commitment to tackling global warming but notes that without further measures the United Kingdom is unlikely to reach its targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions; recognises that environmentally-benign refrigerants with low global-warming potential and significant energy-saving potential are not available for all refrigerant applications; and therefore urges the Government to introduce a system to incentivise a switch to such refrigerants, thus making a major contribution to filling the gap in policy on greenhouse gases.*]

The motion relates to environmentally benign refrigerants—or friendly fridges, as we have called the relevant campaign. The motion draws the attention of the House to the problems of global warming. One of the problems is that in switching refrigerants from chlorofluorocarbons to hydrofluorocarbons we are reducing quite significantly, and very properly, the problems of the ozone layer, but the HFCs that are being used are causing severe problems with global warming. They are about 2,000 times worse than carbon monoxide. There are alternatives, and we welcome the Government's commitment to reducing global warming. However, we think that further action could be taken. I would like the Government to consider incentivising a switch to alternatives. I ask for an early debate on this issue in view of its importance.

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot promise my hon. Friend an early debate on the matter. However, I can tell her that the Government are developing a new climate change programme. Within that, we will be seeking to arrive at a balanced package of policies and measures covering all sectors and all gases. The problem, which given her remarks, my hon. Friend clearly appreciates, is the disadvantages of different measures. It is important to achieve a balance.

It is our intention to issue a draft programme for consultation later this year, and my hon. Friend may wish to return to the matter then. I had not previously heard the description "friendly fridges". People are always talking about new machines that will speak to us, so it opens up a rather endearing prospect.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Although the right hon. Lady is committed to a more structured

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

parliamentary year, she was not able to answer the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) about the Whitsun recess. Is it her intention for the House to sit on 11 June, the day of the European elections, or not? It would be helpful to Members of this House, and, more particularly—*[Interruption.]* I should have said 10 June; I am sorry. It would be helpful to Members of this House, and also to all who work here, to know whether she expects the House to sit on that day or not.

Mrs. Beckett: I am truly sorry not to be able to oblige the hon. Gentleman with the information that he seeks, but those matters are under consideration. That is why I have not been able to announce the dates of the Whitsun recess. I have given the House an indication that we expect the recess to include the week of 31 May, if I recall correctly, but I fear that I cannot go further at present.

Points of Order

1.12 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you reflect on the use of business questions—in this case, by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow)—to make highly tendentious and offensive ad hominem remarks about a named person? Mr. Greg Dyke is a friend of mine, and if he had to be mentioned this morning, it might have been as a long-term director of the successful Manchester United football club rather than in the terms used by the hon. Gentleman. If such remarks are to be made under the cloak of privilege, does not that raise questions at least for the manners, if not for the rules, of the House of Commons?

Madam Speaker: I think we should always remind ourselves that we in this House have a great many privileges. Those privileges have to be tempered with responsibility. When we use the names of people outside, who have very great difficulty in responding, we should be extremely careful and consider our responsibilities as well as the privileges that we have here.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will know that there has been widespread concern across the Floor of the House—and, indeed, outside—about the detention of Senator Pinochet in this country. You have made a number of rulings to the effect that, because the matter is sub judice, it is not one with which the House may deal.

I leave aside the question whether it should be right that, uniquely, the House should not be able to discuss the matter when it is the subject of intensive, wall-to-wall coverage in the media, but I ask you specifically, Madam Speaker, to comment on the advice that I understand was given in the other place to my noble Friend Lord Lamont of Lerwick, who sought yesterday to raise the question of the exercise of the Home Secretary's discretion.

My noble Friend apparently took advice from the Clerk of the Parliaments—who, I understand, is the Clerk of the other place. He was advised that, although other matters may be sub judice, the ruling of the Home Secretary is not. No application has been made for it to be reviewed in court, so it is not sub judice.

I do not wish in any way to humble the Clerk of this House, but I understand that, technically, he is the under-Clerk of the Parliaments and, therefore, the Clerk of the Parliaments in the other place perhaps has the correct wisdom on this matter. I propose to you, Madam Speaker, that, given that the Clerk of the Parliaments has advised that it is perfectly legitimate for this very important matter to be the subject of questions in the other place, surely it ought to be open to Members of this House to raise it. Many of us feel that the Home Secretary has acted disgracefully towards a friend of the United Kingdom and of our forces.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman and the House will of course understand that neither the Clerk of the Parliaments nor the Clerk of the House rules on such matters. In this House the Speaker will give the ruling, which may be based on the advice of the Clerk.

I have not seen the advice which I understand was given to Lord Lamont. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me have it. I shall certainly look at it as soon as I retire to my chambers, and I may comment on it at some stage. The hon. Gentleman will understand, however, that what he has told me is news to me, and that I should like a chance to examine it and reflect on it.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. My point is relevant not least because, were you able to give an early indication of your response to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), it might be possible for the House to discuss the matter. It urgently needs an opportunity to do so.

Madam Speaker: That is hardly a further point of order. I have given my commitment to the House: I have said that I will examine the position.

Mr. Howarth *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I can go no further. I have given a commitment to examine the hon. Gentleman's point. He did not give me notice of it, so, in all fairness and justice, he must now give me an opportunity to examine the advice given elsewhere.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is a separate point of order. I am sure that you will wish to correct a small inaccuracy: I am sure that it is not correct that our Clerk, or indeed any Officer of the House of Commons, is in any way subsidiary to any officer in any other place.

Madam Speaker: I think that that is correct. We regard the Clerk of the House of Commons as very superior; at least, I do.

Mr. Howarth: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for not giving you notice of my earlier point. I refer you and others to column 1162 of yesterday's *Official Report*, House of Lords.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May we have a ruling on whether Members who are concerned about the apparent contempt for the rule of law shown by some Members of both Houses will be able to comment on it, especially when their contempt constitutes contempt for the rule of law that they passed when they were in government?

Madam Speaker: That is hardly a point of order for me, but I note the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Orders of the Day

Disability Rights Commission Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

1.17 pm

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

We can be proud that a Labour Government are introducing this historic and long-overdue measure, which will make a real difference both to disabled people and to the overall welfare of our society. The establishment of the Disability Rights Commission is a tribute to the tireless campaigning of countless members of voluntary organisations, as well as the campaigning of a number of distinguished Members of both Houses. We thank them for their efforts, which have now borne fruit.

Let me stress two important points. First, this is not a partisan measure, as I hope that it will command support in all quarters of the House. It is important to disabled people that it should do so, because if they are to benefit fully from its provisions they will need the widest possible consensus that their rights should be advanced, recognised and enforced.

Secondly, although the Bill and the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission represent an important step forward, they do not represent the whole journey. Not long after we took office, I announced a three-part strategy for disability rights: the implementation of the remaining parts of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the establishment of a disability rights task force and the creation of a Disability Rights Commission. We have made good progress on all three proposals. In addition, we have introduced £195 million of help for disabled people under the new deal, reduced the threshold on employment covered by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, improved the access-to-work scheme and published a Green Paper on special educational needs, for whose action plan £60 million is earmarked. We are extending part M of the building regulations, and introducing a new disability income guarantee and disabled person's tax credit. All those are practical measures that extend disabled people's rights.

We know that there is still much to do to change attitudes and behaviour so that we can really eliminate discrimination and fully harness the technology that has such wonderful power to transform many disabled people's lives for the better. However, I believe that progress is being made and, moreover, that public opinion has shifted decisively in wanting full and fair opportunities for disabled people as members of our community.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I share the sense of unanimity that is evident in the House, but will the Minister say why the commission proposed in the Bill does not extend to Northern Ireland, even though the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 do?

Mr. Smith: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the Bill, and I acknowledge his long-standing interest

[Mr. Smith]

in and commitment to these matters, which is recognised in the House. I can tell him that the Northern Ireland Act 1998 provides that equalities in Northern Ireland are safeguarded by other means, as I shall explain later in my speech.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend, and my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), now Minister for the Arts, on their introduction of the Bill. My right hon. Friend is right to say that this is not a matter for party contention, but is he aware that only one Conservative Back-Bench Member is present—the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins)? I hope that the hon. Gentleman will try to explain why the Conservative party spent the 1995–96 Session opposing the establishment of the commission.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes a telling point. I trust that Conservative Members have learned from that experience and from the public reaction to it. The Conservative party's resistance to the commission was held in particular contempt by disabled people. I believe that the Conservative party intends to support the Bill, and I welcome that. The broader the consensus that can be achieved for the work of the commission, the more inclusive will be the support for it and the better off disabled people will be.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I am happy to tell the Minister that Conservative Members support the creation of the Disability Rights Commission, although that does not mean that we do not think that the Bill cannot be improved in many ways. We support the concept of creating the commission.

Mr. Smith: Fair enough, and I greatly welcome the support from all parties on the Opposition Benches for the measure. After all, the inclusive and better society that we want to achieve cannot include some people and not others—it has to include everybody. There are more than 8.5 million disabled people in this country. It is only right that their rights, and the tackling of discrimination, should be regarded as high priorities.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, and I share the House's warmth towards the Bill. He has explained the arrangements covering Northern Ireland, but will he say how he expects the provisions to be applied in Scotland and Wales after 1 July?

Mr. Smith: I am pleased to be able to tell my right hon. Friend that I shall say more about the position in Scotland later in my remarks. However, I take this opportunity to place on record our appreciation of my right hon. Friend's long-standing involvement in and commitment to the cause of civil rights for disabled people, which played no small part in the introduction of the Bill.

I said that there are 8.5 million disabled people in the country, and that their rights should be a high priority. The moral and ethical justification is enough in itself, but there are broad and sound economic and social reasons as well. The important thing is that policies and practices that advance disabled people's rights build a better Britain, for them and for us all.

The Disability Rights Commission will have a central role. It will be a source of advice and support for disabled people. It will work with organisations that represent their interests. It will need to work with everyone else who has a stake in its purpose. The links that it forges with employers and service providers will need to be strong and productive. It needs to work with them and to build their confidence, so that it can be constructive in helping them to act in accordance with the spirit, as well as the letter, of the law.

Employers and service providers will need to understand and to embrace change if that change is to be real and effective. Getting that relationship right is key to the fulfilment of the commission's purpose in helping to foster the attitudes and behaviour that will make disabled people's rights a reality.

The needs of a necessarily wide constituency will place a variety of demands on the commission, but we must guard against being too prescriptive in the Bill about how to achieve its aims. If it is to be allowed to do its job properly, it needs to be able to operate flexibly as well with a proper measure of independence from Government. We must empower it to take a wide range of action and trust it to use its resources wisely to achieve its objectives. The Bill strikes a good balance between direction and discretion, and ensures that the commission has the powers that it needs to do the job.

The commission will have the resources. It has been provisionally allocated set-up costs of £3 million and an annual budget of £11 million. That is a fair settlement, taking account of the experience of the other equality commissions. However, I assure the House that the budget is not set in stone. As the Government made clear in another place, we are prepared to review the budget in the light of operational experience. That is a reasonable way in which to proceed.

By way of background to the Bill, let me say that much thought, work and consultation went in to preparing its provisions. As its first job, we asked the disability rights task force to make recommendations on the commission's role and functions. I place on record the thanks of the Government—and, I feel sure, of the whole House—for the work of the task force. Its recommendations formed the basis of a White Paper that we published last July, which received strong support not just from disabled people but from employers and service providers.

The Bill reflects very closely the proposals that we set out in the White Paper. In making its recommendations, the task force sensibly examined existing equality commissions in the areas of sex and race in Britain, as well as bodies with similar roles abroad. A number of the Bill's provisions mirror those on the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality. Where consistency makes sense, we have striven to achieve it. Equally, where it is desirable to update the provisions, we have done so.

The Bill was well received in another place, attracting support from all parties. A handful of amendments were adopted, largely to clarify some of the technical or operational details. We are keen to press on with establishing the commission and with getting it up and running. We expect that to happen by spring next year.

The commission's duties, which are set out in clause 2, will be to work towards the elimination of discrimination against disabled people; to promote the equalisation of opportunities for disabled people; to take appropriate steps to encourage good practice and to keep under review the workings of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and of the Bill when it becomes an Act.

I have already mentioned the important role that the commission will have in working with disabled people and the business and voluntary sectors, and the need for it to balance its activities in a way that best meets the aims that have been set. We believe that much can be achieved by promoting good practice and that it is therefore important that the commission should have such a function in the Bill.

Within those duties, the commission will be able to offer advice to Ministers on existing and proposed legislation—whether emanating from this country or from Europe—wherever issues arise connected with the elimination of discrimination, or equalisation of opportunities for disabled people. I am pleased to assure the House that this will include the Human Rights Act 1998. The commission will be able to give its views formally to Government on that Act and on the full range of relevant legislation. However, how and when to do that should, rightly, be a matter for the commission itself, and the Bill allows the commission that flexibility.

Clauses 3 to 5 are concerned with the commission's ability to undertake formal investigations to determine whether discrimination has taken or is taking place. They also deal with the action required by those who are the subject of investigations. Of course the Commission will work with employers, service providers and others to try to avoid discrimination initially, and, when it occurs, to tackle it through dialogue. However, when constructive dialogue does not achieve the desired effect, the commission must have the teeth needed to deal with those who persist in discriminating unlawfully.

The arrangements proposed in the Bill are based on those that currently apply to the other equality commissions; but there are also differences. We have sought to modernise and strengthen the provisions, taking account of evolving practice in those other commissions. The Bill provides that the Secretary of State may make regulations supplementing provisions affecting formal investigations, thereby allowing flexibility in responding to change and future needs.

Clause 4 currently allows for regulations to be made to define further the scope of non-discrimination notices, which are served on those who have been subject to a formal investigation when they are found to be discriminating unlawfully. The regulation-making power was intended to allow us to refine the process at a later date, taking account of changes arising from the CRE and EOC reviews. However, we have now made some further progress on that complex matter, and I therefore hope that it will prove possible to table amendments in Committee to include more detail on the matter in the Bill.

The Bill also proposes that the commission may enter into legally binding written agreements with a body that is being formally investigated. The intention is that such an agreement will bring to a halt any formal investigation and avoid the need for a non-discrimination notice. Placing such an arrangement in statute is a good innovation, which will be entirely new to equality commissions in Great Britain.

We should like the commission to work constructively with bodies that are keen to deal with shortcomings that they have identified in their organisation, and realise that that may be achieved best through written agreements. Such agreements could be reached more quickly than going through the formal investigation process, and, in many cases, are more likely to work with good will on both sides. However, if the agreements break down, we have made provision for aspects which might otherwise have been dealt with by the issue of a non-discrimination notice to be enforceable through the courts.

We believe that it is right to make such provision. Written agreements should be seen as a better option for employers or service providers who are acting unlawfully and want to do something about it, but not as a soft option. The commission will also be able to resume an investigation that was previously halted.

Our proposals on written agreements demonstrate very clearly one of the relationships that we want the commission to foster, so that agreed action by organisations is achieved by co-operation rather than grudging compliance.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I simply seek some clarification. Although non-discrimination notices will be public, and there will be a public database of them, will written agreements be public or private?

Mr. Smith: I expect that they will be public.

Clause 6 allows the commission to assist individuals with a range of support when they seek redress for being discriminated against. It also states the criteria that the commission will use in determining which cases to support.

We want the commission to be able to support test cases, which will help to clarify the law and help disabled people who could not secure their rights without assistance. Within the criteria, the commission will be able to take account of the impact that a person's disability has on his or her ability to pursue the case unaided. The criteria will allow ample scope to those who are likely to need help most; for example, those with mental health problems, those with learning disabilities or those with severe sensory impairments.

I recognise, too, the force of the argument that the commission itself should be able to take cases on behalf of individuals, or a group of individuals with a common complaint. It is a concern that I understand, and one that the Government are addressing. Through the representative actions working group, the Lord Chancellor is looking at the issue of representative actions. It is a complex area that raises some fundamental issues of law, such as defining who can bring representative actions, the scope of relief and the definition of groups.

For those reasons, it is neither necessary nor sensible for us to act unilaterally by changing the Bill. However, let me assure the House that we will seek to ensure—if necessary, through legislation—that any new powers which may be conferred on bodies as a result of these considerations, will apply to the Disability Rights Commission.

Clause 7 allows the commission to recover costs of providing assistance to individuals when a court—or, more rarely, a tribunal—makes an award for costs. That replicates the arrangements which already apply to the EOC and the CRE.

[Mr. Smith]

Clause 8 deals with codes of practice relating to employment and access to goods and services. We believe that the commission should be charged with the role of producing codes that will give practical guidance to the public, business, service providers and others on how to avoid discrimination, promote the equalisation of opportunities and encourage good practice.

Courts and tribunals will have to have regard to the codes when considering cases of discrimination. The commission will be required to produce a draft code for consultation before it goes to the Secretary of State for approval. The codes must be laid in draft before this House and another place before they can be brought into force.

Clause 9 allows for the commission to make arrangements for the provision of a conciliation service dealing with disputes under part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—access to goods, services, facilities and premises. Conciliation arrangements are already available in the area of employment—covered by part II of the 1995 Act—where that function is undertaken by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

We want the Disability Rights Commission to arrange for and monitor a conciliation service in the area of part III of the 1995 Act. We want it to be available to disabled people and service providers directly, rather than by first going to a business or voluntary organisation for advice, which is the somewhat cumbersome procedure currently under the Disability Access Rights Advice Service.

Clause 10 replaces the bureaucratic mechanism for reviewing the small employer's threshold below which the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 do not apply. It requires the Secretary of State to consult the Disability Rights Commission—in addition to those whom he is already required to consult—about adjustments to the small employer threshold. The commission will be in a key position to advise the Secretary of State on this important matter.

There are a few other points that I would like to mention. I would like to thank the disability rights task force, all the groups and individuals who contributed ideas and the officials who have worked on the White Paper and the Bill. I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East, who have accomplished something of real value in their periods of responsibility for bringing forward the Bill.

I pay tribute also to the good work the members of the National Disability Council have done, and continue to do. That body, which is—to a limited extent—a predecessor of the Disability Rights Commission will be abolished when the commission is established.

On the composition of the commission itself, I would like to underline that the Bill provides for the majority of commissioners and either the chair or deputy chair to be disabled people or people who have had a disability.

Mr. Stephen Twigg (Enfield, Southgate): I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about the composition of the commission. As he will know, we have recently reformed the all-party group on epilepsy. Millions of people have hidden disabilities, and the all-party group is concerned that the needs of such people should be reflected in the general work and in the membership of the commission. I would be grateful if the Government could consider that as the Bill proceeds.

Mr. Smith: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the reformation of the all-party group on epilepsy. Epilepsy is a serious condition that affects very many people. I am pleased to give him the assurance that epilepsy will be one of the disabilities covered by the legislation, so assistance and advice will be available.

The provision that the chair or deputy chair will be disabled or have had a disability will ensure that disabled people will be directly represented in a senior capacity on the commission and that there will be an appropriate balance of interests among the commissioners, allowing the commission to be credible with all stakeholders.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): The Minister made a strong case for the provision that the chair or deputy chair should either be disabled or have a history of disability. May I press him on that point? Does he agree that, especially in the first year of the commission's existence, it would give a very strong signal indeed to the communities outside who are following this debate with great interest, if he could say that his preference would be that the chair should be someone who is disabled or with a history of disability?

Mr. Smith: There is an enormously strong case for the first chair, in particular, to be someone who is disabled or who has had a disability, but I do not think, to be frank, that it would be right to write such a requirement into the Bill. Apart from anything else, my right hon. and hon. Friends and I—and, I believe, the public at large—want the person who chairs the commission to know that he or she was appointed as the best person for the job and not only because of having a disability. That is mainstreaming in practice; to do otherwise smacks of gesturism.

The Commission's remit will extend to England, Scotland and Wales. In Northern Ireland, the arrangements set out in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 will apply. The experience of existing equality commissions has shown that offices in each of England, Scotland and Wales have been necessary and invaluable. We will expect the Disability Rights Commission to operate in a similar way, but I think that it should determine what other arrangements are necessary in the light of experience. For example, the commissioners might want to consider whether the commission should establish regional offices.

As I said at the outset, the Bill is part of a wider programme to advance rights and opportunities for disabled people, and we are considering more generally how to advance disabled people's rights and counter discrimination. That is an important part of our strategy, but it would have been quite wrong for it to hold up this legislation, which has been so long and so eagerly awaited by disabled people.

The disability rights task force is considering those wider issues, especially in relation to the acknowledged inadequacies of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Recommendations from the task force are expected later this year. We all look forward to them. I can assure the

House that we will hold consultations on any administrative or legislative steps that are considered necessary, and that we regard that work, too, as very important as part of our overall strategy for comprehensive civil rights. It is an important task to win public support not just for the principle of fairness for disabled people, but for the practical action that makes it a reality.

That is why we are launching this spring a two or three-year disability hearts and minds campaign. It will counter disability discrimination by raising public awareness of the barriers that disabled people face and how they can be overcome. It will also help businesses and service providers to understand exactly what is required of them in law. The campaign is being drawn up in partnership with disability and business organisations. I am confident that, together with the Bill and all the other steps that we are taking, it will help enable disabled people to take a full part in society.

I am convinced that integration generates its own momentum, for at the bottom of much discrimination lies fear. At the root of that fear is ignorance, so the more chance everyone has to meet disabled people—in the classroom, in the workplace, in the supermarket—the more the corrosive base of prejudice will be eroded.

What matters most is not simply Acts of Parliament, or commissions, codes or regulations. They are not the ends, but simply the means. What matters is the change in attitudes and behaviour, respect for decent human values, opening up opportunity and ending unfair discrimination, so that there is real change in the lives of disabled people, recognising that their opportunity enriches the whole community.

I believe that the Bill and the Disability Rights Commission that it creates will do an enormous amount to advance those opportunities. Today we bring closer full civil rights for disabled people. It therefore gives me particular pleasure to commend the Bill to the House.

1.47 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): This is indeed an important debate for disabled people. It involves the establishment, as the Minister said, of an organisation for which disabled people, disability organisations and those involved in disability issues have argued for some time.

I recognise the disappointment and frustration that were felt when the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was introduced without an enforcement mechanism such as the proposed commission. That was widely felt to have been a significant omission. Despite that, we should not play down the importance of the 1995 Act as the first major piece of anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people in Britain.

I was not in the House during the passage of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. I recognise that there was much debate, and many heated arguments about the scope of the Act, the lack of an enforcement mechanism and many other issues. I acknowledge that many Members, and former Members now in another place, have campaigned long and hard for anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people. In particular, the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), who is in the Chamber today, tabled a private Member's Bill on the subject. I shall not dwell on that; indeed, standing where I do, perhaps it is better not to.

Whatever the omissions from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, it marked an important milestone for disabled people. I pay tribute to the work done by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition in introducing that legislation during his time as Minister for Social Security and Disabled People.

The view that we should not play down the significance of the 1995 Act is supported by a comment that I read in an article published a few months ago by David Grayson, the chairman of the National Disability Council, who stated:

"The DDA certainly has weaknesses, but we must not under-estimate it. Indeed, we must not fall into the trap of talking the DDA down so much that businesses and others think it is so fundamentally flawed that no one will enforce it hard, so they don't need to worry for a few more years yet. That would be the worst of all possible worlds."

The Bill establishes an enforcement mechanism. I reiterate what I said in an intervention in the Minister's speech: the Opposition will support the creation of the Disability Rights Commission. It was indeed one of the first questions that I was asked when I took over my present portfolio. My right hon. Friend the Shadow Leader of the House made our position clear when he responded to the Gracious Speech at the start of this Session. He said:

"We will support the creation of a disability rights commission, although we shall look closely at the detail. I hope that the commission will ensure that the landmark disability rights legislation, which I took through the House, is properly enforced and leads to a lasting change for disabled people."—[*Official Report*, 24 November 1998; Vol. 321, c. 16-17.]

As my right hon. Friend made clear, support for the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission does not mean that we do not think that the Bill can be improved. We have already demonstrated during the passage of the Bill through the other place that there are improvements that can be made. Indeed, the Government have already accepted a small number of our proposals. I shall refer to some of them later.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): For the historical record, will the hon. Lady remind us why the Disability Rights Commission was not included in the 1995 legislation? What does she think has changed since then?

Mrs. May: As I said earlier, I was not in the House when the legislation went through, so I cannot instantly recall the debates. My understanding is that the then Government made it clear that they would look to see whether an enforcement mechanism would be necessary, having established as part of that Act the National Disability Council to advise them on issues relating to disability discrimination.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): For the record, the Government at the time did not say that they were considering introducing a commission. They fought tooth and nail to stop one being introduced. I welcome today's unity, but the hon. Lady should be aware that there was no doubt about why the Government did what they did. They did not want a commission at all.

Mr. Tom Clarke: *rose—*

Mrs. May: I will take two interventions at once.

Mr. Clarke: In the magnanimous spirit in which my hon. Friends have all spoken, I too do not wish to make

[Mr. Clarke]

the hon. Lady feel uncomfortable. Whereas she was not in the House when Bills were being proposed and talked out, happily those who talked them out are not in the House now.

Mrs. May: I note that second intervention and return to the first. I apologise if I gave a misleading impression in my response to the earlier intervention from the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt). The Government did not include in the Bill a reference to an enforcement mechanism such as the commission. Neither did they guarantee that they would introduce such a commission. My understanding is that they said at the time that they believed that the National Disability Council was a preferable route. That was why the Government chose that route at the time. But they said that they would look at the situation as it developed.

Mr. Andrew Smith: We greatly welcome the conversion of the hon. Lady and her colleagues, but they should acknowledge that it is a conversion. The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) said:

"The assumption that there has to be a commission to tackle the problems we know exist is flawed."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 23 February 1995; c. 389.]

I welcome the recognition of Opposition Members that they no longer regard that assumption as flawed.

Mrs. May: The right hon. Gentleman will find that not all Conservative Members opposed the concept of a commission when the legislation was going through the House.

Mr. Collins: I do not want to detain the House for too long on a history lesson. Did my hon. Friend note that our right hon. and noble Friend Lord Campbell of Croy pointed out in the other place that, when he introduced his private Member's Bill, the Disablement Commission Bill, it was defeated with a three-line whipped vote by a Labour Government? Would we not now all do better to concentrate on the future rather than on the mistakes of the past?

Mrs. May: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding Labour Members that they should look further back in history. There has been some hilarity among them on this, but we have made it clear that we support the Disability Rights Commission as the Government are establishing it, although there are aspects of the Bill that could be changed. I recognise that there was much feeling, both inside and outside the House, about the fact that such a commission was not introduced by the Disability Discrimination Act. That has now been addressed by the Government, and we have said that we support the concept. However, we will examine in detail the issues raised by the way in which the Government propose to establish the commission and its functions.

At the heart of the debate are the main functions of the Disability Rights Commission and the question of what will be the main improvements in the lives of disabled people as a result of its establishment. A key task set out by the Minister is enforcement of the Disability Discrimination Act and providing advice and support for disabled people who want to take action under it. The commission is also charged with the ability to conduct formal investigations initiated by the Secretary of State or by itself. Such investigations may result in the issue of non-discrimination notices against firms or service providers requiring certain action to be taken to address the discriminatory behaviour or problems found to be contrary to regulations under Disability Discrimination Act.

I was interested in the Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten). He said that the agreements that the Bill proposes the commission should be able to enter into with employers and others would be made public. We fear that the public register of bodies against whom non-discrimination notices have been issued will not be changed when bodies act to put in place whatever is required by the commission. I understand that their names will remain on the register regardless of whether they cease to contravene the Disability Discrimination Act. We may wish to explore that in Committee in relation to the register of agreements that the Minister said will be kept.

The functions that I have outlined are important and must be exercised judiciously by the commission. They raise an interesting question of timing in respect of how it will operate in its early stages. The Government said again today that assuming a reasonable passage for the Bill and Royal Assent this Session, they expect the commission to be in place in spring 2000. However, the final provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act are not yet in force. Part III starts to come into force in October, but its final provisions will not be in force until 2004. What approach do the Government intend the commission to take to issues arising from the part of the Act that does not kick in for another five years? I assume and hope that the commission will have regard to it and will incorporate it into its thinking on encouraging good practice, education and advice well before it comes into force. It is far better to ensure that goods and service providers know the requirements of the Act and do something about them than to wait for part III to come into force before taking enforcement action.

Awareness is one of the commission's most important aspects. That is why Baroness Blatch moved an amendment to make it a duty of the commission to encourage good practice. The original Bill was rather vague in saying that the commission "may" encourage good practice. I welcome the fact that the Government listened and tabled an amendment to make it a duty. We may argue about the exact words that have been used when we come to the detail in Committee, but the spirit and principle are there, and we certainly welcome that. Not only is that right, but it reflects the recommendation of the disability task force on the issue in its July 1998 report, in which it said:

"We propose that the main duties of the DRC should be to: work towards the elimination of discrimination against disabled people"—

a duty that was in the original draft legislation and remains in the Bill—

"promote the equalisation of opportunities for disabled people with those of non-disabled people;"—

that is also in the Bill—and

"promote good practice".

It is important that that has now been recognised and incorporated into the Bill because it links with the other key task of the commission to work towards the elimination of discrimination and the equalisation of opportunities.

Underlying those duties is what I believe is the fundamental matter at the heart of the Bill. I am sure that we all agree across the House that the biggest battle that we have to fight is the battle of attitudes. Sadly, discrimination is likely to continue until everyone recognises that disabled people should not be treated differently and that they want equal access to employment, goods and services and many other things that we all take for granted, but which are all too often denied to them through unthinking and ignorant attitudes. Disabled people need to be secure in the knowledge that they will not be turned away from the pub or restaurant because some unthinking manager thinks that their presence will put off his other customers. They want to know that they will be given a job because of their ability to do it, not refused because someone thinks that it will be too difficult to accommodate them in the office.

Legislation sets out the requirements for practices, procedures, policies and physical access and the commission provides an enforcement mechanism, but neither of those functions will change hearts and minds. That is why we believe that there needs to be a strong element in the remit of the commission of working with employers and providers of goods and service to raise awareness and educate people. The commission should not be a litigious body or a legalistic body that sees litigation as its first port of call. It should work to ensure that disabled people do not suffer the discrimination that would lead to legal action in the first place. To do that, it needs to work with people, not adopt a confrontational attitude.

I welcome the Minister's comments about the need for the commission to work constructively with employers and others. That approach was certainly suggested when the Government first announced their intention to introduce a commission in a written answer given by the former Minister for disabled people, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), who is on the Government Front Bench today, to a question tabled by the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (Mrs. Heal) on 21 July last year:

"We emphasise that we expect that the commission should not work in an adversarial or oppressive way. There need be no tension between the interests of disabled people and the interests of employers and service providers. The commission should be seen as supportive of both disabled people and businesses alike."—[*Official Report*, 21 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. *519*.]

The hon. Member for Newport, East brought to his former post a particular interest in and experience of disability issues. I trust from the comments that have been made this afternoon that his view of the commission is shared by the current Minister with responsibility for disabled people.

It is worth noting that the view expressed by the hon. Gentleman is shared by the Confederation of British Industry, which has welcomed the Disability Rights Commission. It has said:

"The CBI believes that the Commission will have a very important role to play to support and progress implementation of the complex social reforms and the positive actions contained in the Disability Discrimination Act. We believe there is a crucial role for the Commission to provide a comprehensive educational and advisory service to all of the business community. We therefore urge the Commission during its first year to build on goodwill, and work in partnership with business to change attitudes and help to recognise inadvertent barriers before using enforcement powers as a means of eliminating discrimination against disabled people. In particular, it is key that businesses are able to: better understand the scope of the DDA and the definition of disability, know how and when to implement reasonable adjustments under the DDA, incorporate disability as integral to equal opportunities goals and good management practice."

A key issue, which must be addressed at an early stage, is implied in that comment from the CBI: the current lack of understanding among all too many companies as to their existing and forthcoming responsibilities under the DDA. The issue is important; I fear that many companies do not understand what is being, and will be, required of them. At a very early stage, it will be necessary for the Disability Rights Commission to work to ensure that companies understand those requirements and responsibilities.

Mr. Oaten: Does the hon. Lady agree that the education of those companies is not helped by the fact that about 80 per cent. of companies have less than 15 employees and are exempt from some of the regulations under the DDA? That cannot help the education process that the commission will have to establish.

Mrs. May: I had intended to refer to the employer threshold issue later in my comments. It is important and has already been debated in the Standing Committee. It was raised by several of their lordships when the Bill was debated in another place.

The Minister mentioned the Government's forthcoming hearts and minds campaign, which was intended to work with business to encourage the process of changing hearts and minds. The Government should note that there is some scepticism among disability organisations about that campaign and its likely impact. We all want to ensure that hearts and minds and attitudes are changed in the right way, but, if the campaign is to be effective, the Government will have to be careful about the way in which it is put in place.

That view about the importance of working with organisations is echoed in the article to which I referred earlier, written by the chairman of the National Disability Council, David Grayson. He gave some examples of the way in which the commission could work with people, rather than against them. He referred to certain cases that had been reported in *Disability Now*, in which disabled people had been refused access to pubs. He continued:

"DRC will certainly want to support test cases to establish the law or make formal investigations.

But if it is using its brain as well as its brawn it will be creative too. It could go to major brewers like Bass and Whitbread and national representatives of pub landlords and persuade them to develop an industry-wide awareness and education campaign for pub staff. They could also promote disabled customer-friendly practices . . . British business must be persuaded to respond more energetically to the needs of disabled people in the marketplace and the workplace . . . if we mobilise our collective power as disabled consumers—plus the purchasing power of our families and friends—we can be a formidable business force too."

Certainly, helping companies to recognise the importance of disabled people as consumers or potential employees will be an important task for the commission. However, the issue is broader than that; the commission has a general role in raising awareness, in education and in the promotion of good practice. The body will have the scope to work to increase understanding of disability and of the rights, expectations and needs of disabled people

[Mrs. May]

generally, not only among employers and service providers. That is an important function and I trust the commission will see it as a key element of its work. I repeat our belief that the commission should not be a confrontational, legalistic or litigious body, but one that works with all parties genuinely to improve the environment for disabled people.

A number of issues remain uncertain in the Bill and in relation to the commission. The first is not specific to the Bill, although the Minister referred to it in his speech; it is the funding of the commission. The Government have stated that they will fund the commission to the tune of £3 million this financial year for set-up costs and £11 million in 2000-01; a provisional budget of £11 million has been set for the following year.

That is less than the amount given to the Commission for Racial Equality. The Government's argument is that the CRE has to pass on about £4 million to local race equality councils—hence the difference in funding. I tried to ascertain from the Government the basis of their decision to award £11 million, given the functions of the commission. I cannot remember whether it took me three or four questions to the Minister. One of the arts that one has to learn when one becomes a Member of Parliament is that of tabling the right question at the Table Office, and I confess that I do not always get it right the first time—or even the second or third.

During a considerable period of trying, I was first told that the basis for the £11 million figure was estimated costs for the different functions of the commission; then, when I asked what the estimated costs of those different functions were, I was told that it would be up to the commission to estimate the costs of the different functions. Finally, having rephrased the question yet again, I was told:

"interim estimates indicate 10 per cent. of that annual budget may be devoted to administrative costs; 40 per cent. to advice and information, conciliation, assistance to individuals and formal investigations; 30 per cent. to promotional work, and 20 per cent. to policy work."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1999; Vol. 324, c. *600*.]

However, estimates were not available in respect of the specific functions as set out in the Bill.

I note that the Minister said that the issue was one that the Government would monitor in future and I recognise that the functions of the Commission for Racial Equality and the way in which it undertakes them may differ from those of the Disability Rights Commission; however, the DRC will have specific extra costs, such as those of ensuring that all information is available in forms that are accessible to all disabled people. The Government will have to consider that issue carefully and take advice from the commission in the early stages of its operation.

Mr. Andrew Smith: No one disputes that the commission will face certain costs in connection with meeting the particular needs of disabled people. However, in the spirit of and in line with the requirements of the Bill and of the DDA, we expect the other commissions to make their material available in Braille and other forms that are accessible to disabled people, so they too face those costs.

Mrs. May: I hesitate to suggest that, having made that statement, the Minister might now receive a call from those involved in the CRE and the Equal Opportunities Commission. Of course it is important that information and advice from those other bodies is available to disabled people in forms that they are able to access.

Another issue requiring clarification is raised on the face of the Bill itself: the relationship between the commission's work and the implications of the Human Rights Act 1998. I suspect that other hon. Members will question whether it is appropriate for that relationship to be set down on the face of the Bill, or whether it should be in regulations, as the Minister indicated. The Government need to examine closely the impact of the Human Rights Act in respect of disabled people and on Government responsibilities, such as the health service and social services provision.

Having participated in some of the debates on the Human Rights Act as it passed through its stages in the House, I am not convinced that the Government have fully and properly considered the implications that that legislation might have for some of those matters. The case reported into today's newspapers of young David Glass, whose family resuscitated him when the hospital had decided that he should be allowed to die, brings that issue sharply into focus.

One of the functions that the commission should undertake in relation to education is not specified in the Bill: advice and information are referred to, but not training. It is important that the commission should be able to provide training for those with whom it deals and those who are affected by its work. Obviously, it will work with other bodies in pursuing that function, but the Bill should not ignore the issue of training.

In response to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), I said that I would refer to the employer threshold. Many of us were surprised when the Government, who in opposition had said that they would reduce the threshold from 20 to two, reduced it from 20 to 15 on coming into power. That caused considerable consternation among disability organisations, which wondered why the Government had suddenly changed an opinion to which they had held so fast when in opposition. It has been our experience in respect of many issues that the Labour party in government is going back on many of the pledges that it made when in opposition. It is easy to make promises when in opposition, but now that Labour is in Government, it finds it cannot deliver on those pledges.

Because of amendments moved in respect of that issue, it was debated at some length in the other place. I note that the Bill mentions "the procedure for change" and there is some good argument for making sure that that procedure is rather easier than it was previously. However, the question of why the Government have not decreased the threshold further than they have is one to which many disability organisations will continue to want a proper answer.

Mr. Levitt: Is the hon. Lady aware that, following the reduction in the threshold, well in excess of 90 per cent. of employees now work for employers who are covered by the legislation, and that only a small minority of employees continue to be excluded? The role of the DRC will be to advise the Government, not only on the number of employees at which disability organisations want the threshold to be set, but on the number that industry and

business will accept. That number will be a first, not a last, step in reducing the threshold, so the issue is how fast and in what way the threshold will be reduced. The time has not yet come to judge the Government on the absolute level of the threshold.

Mrs. May: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that about 80 per cent. of companies are not covered by the arrangements—*[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) says, from a sedentary position, "Peanuts".

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge): I said people.

Mrs. May: I do apologise. In that case, I shall not proceed with the rebuke that I was going to issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. That is a very good example of how sedentary remarks are unhelpful, even when they provoke a response.

Mrs. May: They are even less helpful when I cannot hear them properly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Eighty per cent. of companies are not covered and the issue that the Government must answer is why, when Labour Members were so keen for the threshold to be reduced to two when they were in opposition, the Government failed to do that when they had the opportunity to do so.

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): At what level does the hon. Lady believe the threshold should be set?

Mrs. May: We have not set a threshold—[HON. MEMBERS: "Twenty."] I will say this: during the debate in the other place, we said that, if the threshold was to be reduced to the sort of level that many disability organisations wanted, we would question why it was to be two and not one. I fail to see why, if the level is to be reduced to such a low number, one should disadvantage sole employees of small businesses and not allow them the protection of the Disability Discrimination Act from which other employees benefit. I suspect that we may return to that issue in Committee or the later stages of the Bill.

On the question of the representational nature of the commission, the Government have indicated that half of the members of the commission should be disabled or have had a disability. It is important to consider the issue of representation, and I trust that it is not the Government's intention to say that each member of the commission is representative of a particular disability. Although it is necessary to ensure that the commission covers a wide range of types of disability, it is important that the commissioners are appointed because they are the right people with the right experience, not as individuals wearing some sort of specific representative hat.

It is also important that a cross-section of interests should be represented on the commission. That point was made when the hon. Member for Newport, East, then a Minister at the Department for Education and Employment, initially set out his intention of establishing the commission, and I trust that the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities will confirm that that remains the Government's position. The then Education and Employment Minister said:

> "The Commission must be credible with all stakeholders. The body of Commissioners between them will need to have sufficient diversity of experience to be able to take account of the interests of all disabled people and to reflect the interest of all key stakeholders, including those of small businesses."—[*Official Report*, 21 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. *519-20.*]

It is important—particularly given what I have said about the way in which the commission should work with rather than confront people—to ensure that the commission represents all interests. External bodies, such as companies and service providers, must be willing and able to work happily with the commission to ensure that disabled people do not suffer the sort of discrimination that they often experienced in the past.

As I said at the outset, we support the creation of a Disability Rights Commission, which we believe builds on the landmark anti-discrimination legislation introduced by the previous Government. It is another significant step down the road to ensuring that disabled people are treated equally in our society and are valued for the contribution that they do and will make.

2.21 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Although time is short and I know that several of my hon. Friends wish to take part in the debate, I begin by paying tribute to the many people who have made the Bill possible. I feel both humble and proud and, in that spirit, I congratulate warmly the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities and his ministerial team on their remarkable achievement in bringing this measure before the House today.

I shall be gentle with the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). This comment would probably be more appropriate coming from the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), but any sinner who has repented is welcome. However, if the hon. Lady wants to be convincing, the last thing that she should do is refer to the speeches of the Leader of the Opposition—especially when, as Minister, he opposed everything that we have achieved today.

Mrs. May: I am somewhat surprised that the hon. Gentleman should imply sinfulness on the part of someone who was not involved in decisions about the legislation. I hope that he does not adopt that approach to other sins, or we might all be implicated in all sorts of things.

Mr. Clarke: I do not seek to reintroduce the idea of original sin. However, there is a Scottish expression that goes, "If you fly with the crows, you get shot with the crows." The Leader of the Opposition appointed the hon. Lady to perform an almost impossible task: to make the previous Government's policies appear decent.

In the spirit of this debate, I congratulate those who should take pride in today's achievement. Such people include my hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), and a wonderful colleague in my disability team, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston—[HON.

[Mr. Clarke]

MEMBERS: "Erdington."] I could not get my hon. Friend's constituency right in Committee, and I cannot change my habits now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) did a wonderful job, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell). My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey), who has disappeared temporarily from the Chamber, offered marvellous support for my Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 before his election to Parliament. He has continued ever since—now as a Member of Parliament—to fight for the things that he believes in. We look forward to hearing what my hon. Friends have to say if they catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I recognise also the tremendous work of the all-party disablement group which, led by Lord Ashley, has been the real engine room of disability campaigns. It must also be a proud day for my right hon. Friend Lord Morris of Manchester. Nor should we forget the countless numbers of unnamed disabled people and their organisations who fought the good fight when others thought the mountain was too high to climb.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to contribute to the Second Reading of a Bill that has the potential to transform dreams into reality for many millions of disabled people. The Government must be commended for their relatively early introduction of such a comprehensive and important Bill. A pledge has been honoured and a promise implemented speedily.

This is a Bill about people who constitute a substantial minority and yet continue to suffer discrimination in their daily lives that denies them the everyday rights that others take for granted. Much of that is now about to end. Such discrimination is clear to those who know the realities of life for disabled people who are seeking the equal opportunities that lie at the heart of a modern, inclusive Britain and of the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Bill resembles legislation that has long been the norm in many other countries that have benefited from such measures. For example, America offers perhaps the most substantial protection in the world for disabled people. Many aspects of the proposed Disability Rights Commission will resemble measures in the United States, which I have seen for myself in operation. I have witnessed the benefits that such protection brings not only to the lives of disabled people but, importantly, to the United States economy as well. The reasons are obvious. The greater the access for disabled people, the more they, their carers, friends and families spend and contribute to the strength of the United States economy.

We have received many excellent briefings from disability organisations, and Scope deserves congratulations for making that point. It stated:

> The average figure (the statistical mean figure) for workplace adjustments for disabled employees in the USA (October 1997) was $935, but the benefits of these to business was an average of $30,682—a 3200% return on investment."

The hon. Member for Maidenhead referred to the Confederation of British Industry. We welcome its support, and I am sure that it will take that point on board.

For that reason, groups such as the Employers Forum on Disability in the United Kingdom—which speaks for firms such as Marks and Spencer and Barclays—and the CBI have long realised the beneficial effects that a Disability Rights Commission can have for the British economy as well as for our social fabric. Article 3 of the German legislation outlaws discrimination. It says:

> "Nobody shall be discriminated against because of a disability".

Unfortunately, despite many Back-Bench attempts, we were still far behind the legislation of many of our friends abroad—until today. Over the years, the House had seen attempts to introduce legislation to protect the rights of disabled people. All such attempts supported a commission and all, sadly, were in vain. It is tempting—especially in view of earlier exchanges—to dwell upon the fate of former Members of Parliament who talked out those Bills. However, on this happy occasion, I shall be positive about the future and about the anti-discrimination measures that the Bill introduces.

In 1995, at long last, legislation was introduced that turned its back on the suggestion that there was no discrimination against the disabled. That legislation, however much it achieved or did not achieve, was entitled the Disability Discrimination Act. Reality had surfaced, even if many problems were not addressed. We did not get a Disability Rights Commission, but I warned then that its time would come. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I point out to hon. Members, particularly those on the Front Benches, that Madam Speaker takes the strong view that bleepers should not brought into the Chamber while they are switched on.

Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If discrimination does not exist, as was argued in the early days of the previous Government, why is the average income of disabled workers only 80 per cent. of the national average income? I am glad that, in the past couple of weeks, hundreds of thousands of disabled people, among others, have started to receive the benefits of the Government's minimum wage legislation. Similarly, it cannot be right that a disabled person is three times more likely to be unemployed and six times more likely to be turned down for a job than anyone else.

The concern of disabled people, disability organisations and, I am sure, the Government is that the long-awaited Disability Rights Commission should be an effective body. We know that disability has trailed behind gender and race in getting anti-discrimination legislation and a commission, but those who benefited from the commissions combating race and gender discrimination have been as strong in their support of a Disability Rights Commission as I believe the House to be today.

The Bill states that the commission will have substantial duties. It will be encouraged to be proactive, not just a talking shop, and it will have teeth. Remarkably, we are now close to realising the aim for which many of us have fought for many years. I am pleased that the Government have accepted disabled people's demands for comprehensive and enforceable civil rights and have honoured their manifesto commitment to the letter.

I want to ask a few questions of the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), who will wind up the debate, to clarify issues that have been raised by disability organisations and some of my disabled constituents. Will there be an advocate on the

commission, as Mencap has argued there should be, for those whose disabilities are so profound as to preclude them from membership of the commission?

The issue of funding of the commission has been raised, and I welcome my right hon. Friend the Minister's clarification on that point. I understand that the Government have allocated £3 million to set up the commission and then £11 million for each of the two following years. Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary clarify the Government's position on the crucial role—I heard it dismissed earlier—of the commission's views in that matter? Certainly, my Front-Bench colleagues should be congratulated on reaching an agreement with the Treasury because I know that such agreements are not easily achieved.

The exemption for small firms has been mentioned, and I seek more clarification about that in the winding-up of the debate. I do not want to provoke Opposition Front-Bench Members too much, particularly as they appear to have been left sitting on their own, but the plain fact is that, when the previous Government introduced the Disability Discrimination Bill, the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) could not be moved—he wanted to exclude 96 per cent. of firms from that Bill. Pressure in the House, in Committee and from disability organisations means that only 15 per cent. of firms are now exempt, which is 16 per cent. better than the situation that we inherited a couple of years ago.

That said, I do not want to get too cosy with my right hon. and hon. Friends. This is a serious matter, and I want to push the boat out a little further. I shall not be happy, especially when I consider the working relationship that will exist between the commission, employers, employees and disabled people, if, when this Parliament ends, 15 per cent. of firms are still exempt. In its advice, Scope restated the view of many, including myself, when it said:

"The moral and business case for staging a phased reduction of the small employer's exemption is overwhelming."

I know that we have a listening Government, and I am sure that they will take that point on board.

Disabled people are not just the stuff of political lobbying or special interest pleading; their rights constitute the vital, legitimate interests, as the Minister reminded us, of more than 8.5 million of our fellow citizens. They include the blind boy, about to leave school, who was rejected at a job interview the moment that the personnel manager saw his white stick, although he could have done the job as well as anybody else. They include the woman who was refused admission to a cinema because she was in a wheelchair, and the one space for a wheelchair had been set aside for somebody else. She was right to say, "I am not a wheelchair; I am a person."

I am glad that the Bill acknowledges the demands of the One-In-Eight Group, which has campaigned vigorously to ensure that disabled professional actors, entertainers, producers and others have the right to have their talents recognised and not be discriminated against.

Today is the realisation of a dream for many people, some of whom, sadly, are no longer with us. I can never forget heading through the snow north of New York, in the cold winter of 1995, with my then deputy, the late Gordon McMaster. Gordon, who had done so much on disability rights and who was so proud of his "Growing Concern" project, was with me when we had the privilege of being in the home of Christopher Reeve. We could only marvel at Reeve's courage—a quality shared by so many who today feel that their efforts were not in vain.

Improving the rights of disabled people, as the Bill will do, will ensure that we enrich the lives of all. A Disability Rights Commission will help to set a new agenda for disabled people of skills, knowledge and opportunity—a new agenda for a new century and a beacon for the rest of the world. In that spirit, I congratulate the Government most warmly and wish them well.

2.39 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): This is a good day not only, as the Minister rightly said in his opening speech, for people with disabilities, but for the whole country, because our society is stronger if it takes steps towards incorporating disabled people in every practical way. In establishing a Disability Rights Commission explicitly on the model of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, the House is making it clear that we regard discrimination against people with disabilities as every bit as evil and unjustified as discrimination against people on the basis of their sex or the colour of their skin.

This is a good day. Many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House and many on both sides of the other place have waited a long time for such a Bill. I congratulate the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities on being the Minister who brought the Bill forward. I commend him for the tone in which he did so, as I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) for the tone in which she responded to the Minister from the Opposition Front Bench. This is a genuinely non-partisan occasion.

We have had debates about the history of these matters and it is clear that both Labour and Conservative Governments voted down proposals of very much the sort that are contained in the Bill. That was a mistake. I am glad that both parties have changed their mind and can come together to support the principle of the Bill. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead said, there are bound to be individual points of detail that need to be considered further. It may be necessary to consider amendments in this place as others were in another place, but a loud and clear signal should go out from the House to all those throughout the country who have an interest in these issues that they transcend party politics, and that the commission will be put in place for the future and will long remain an important part of it, whatever the outcome of future general elections. This is a landmark occasion in that respect.

I have one or two points to make in respect of those general comments. I welcome the Minister's hope that the commission will be an engine for conciliation and a forum for the provision of information. It must be clear that it would be far better if the work of the commission went forward wherever possible without confrontation and without necessarily always seeking headlines, sparks, clashes and legal actions, through working together with employers, disability organisations and individuals concerned to reach agreement.

An agreement that is voluntarily entered into will always work better and have a better chance of long-standing success than a court decision, where one party feels rather unhappy or disgruntled, or feels that it

[Mr. Tim Collins]

has not received exactly what it wanted and that its interests have not been wholly and fairly presented. The Minister was right to say that he wants the commission to move forward in a co-operative way. I welcome that.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I agree with the points that my hon. Friend is making. Does he agree that it is a good marketing point, for want of a better phrase, for firms to be seen to be friendly and user-friendly towards the disabled, just as, increasingly, it is good for firms to be seen to be environmentally friendly? To promote that does not require regulation and confrontation. I hope that the commission will be able to encourage better employment practices for disabled people in the best interests both of firms and of disabled people.

Mr. Collins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a very good point. To build on that point, let me say that I very much hope that the commission will not merely identify best practice in the abstract in the sense of, "Here is a list of good things that some companies are doing in various parts of the country," but will publicise specific case studies. I hope that it will give good publicity to companies large and small that are operating in compliance with the law, and, I hope, in many instances going beyond the requirements of the law.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, while perhaps in 99 per cent. of cases it will be possible to reach an agreement about discrimination that has been faced, there will always be a small minority—I speak as one of those who have faced discrimination—of employers who have blind, naked prejudice, and will not employ a disabled person irrespective of whatever persuasion is used? In those cases, it is absolutely right that the commission is able to take decisive action.

Mr. Collins: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady. I was going to make that point. In fairness to the Minister, that is what he said. He said that he would prefer it to be possible for there to be conciliation, but added that it was important that the commission should have teeth in dealing with the minority. I hope that the hon. Lady is right and that the minority is as small as 1 per cent. I do not propose to put a figure on it because I simply do not know what it is. However, it is clear that there are problems outside the House and that the commission needs to deal with them. I hope that it will be able to do so with the minimum of fuss, but it needs to have teeth.

A dramatic illustration was given in the other place by Lord Ashley of Stoke, who, in that place as in this, has been a long-standing campaigner on these issues, and the spearhead of many campaigns. He rightly referred to the research of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, which stated that

"the handicap of deafness is a greater obstacle to obtaining employment than a criminal record or a history of drug abuse."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 December 1998; Vol. 595, c. 1470.]

If that is what independent research is establishing, there is a real problem.

The hon. Lady is right to say that such discrimination will often stem from ill-informed prejudice. Such long-standing social attitudes need to be challenged and changed, as is reflected in the welcome progress that has been made generally over the past 20 or 25 years in tackling prejudice on the basis of sex or race. I would not pretend that, as a country, we have eliminated all forms of prejudice in those areas, but we have moved dramatically forward in that time.

I would not say that the only reason for progress in those areas has been the existence of the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality, but undoubtedly they have played their part. I hope that, in 10 or 15 years' time, the existence, the visibility and the practical effect of prejudice against disabled people will have declined at least as sharply as has discrimination on the basis of sex or race over the past 15 or 20 years.

I said that I would make one or two detailed points, and I shall do so. We have already briefly touched on funding. I entirely understand the Minister's reluctance to go beyond what has already been said on the matter. I understand also the reasons that he has set out for arriving at the figure of £11 million for the commission. However, I am intrigued to note that the Government are proposing, at least in the interim, to roll the £11 million forward for the second full operational year.

We all know—I am sure that the Government would be delighted to trumpet the fact—that inflation is at a relatively low level, but it is not non-existent. It is a fact that £11 million in three years' time will not buy as much as £11 million in two years' time. I hope that, at the minimum, the Government will be prepared to consider rolling over the funding in line with inflation, or at least in line with the increases that are provided for the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality.

A central feature of the debate should be to establish that the early years of the commission will be critical. We all hope that the commission will be around for a long time, but the early years will be especially important. That is why it needs to have a flying start.

That brings me to my next point, on which the Minister was kind enough to take an intervention from me. It relates to the identity of the chair of the new commission. The Minister made the perfectly fair point that he feels that, if he were to commit himself in the Bill to employing a person with a disability, or with a history of disability, that might be seen as a gesture of tokenism. Of course, there is already in the Bill a requirement that the chair or the deputy chair should be in that category, and that a majority of members should be in it.

I put it gently to the Minister that, given that one of the primary information roles of the commission will be to try to persuade as many people as possible as quickly as possible that people with disabilities, or a history of disabilities, often are the best men or women for a job, it might seem curious that, when looking for the first chair of the commission, it is not possible to find someone in that category. I know that the Minister probably will not want to go any further. I think that I have probably chivvied him enough. I see from the nods that I am receiving from some Labour Members that there is a degree of support for my proposition. I will leave it at that with the Minister, with the strong hope that he will be

able to find, as I believe he will, someone eminently qualified who happens to be disabled, or has a history of disability.

Another matter that was discussed in the other place in relation to the composition of the commission was taken up by Lord Rix, who has a strong record of work on behalf of Mencap and other charities that deal with people with mental illnesses. He made the point that physical and mental disabilities are not the same. However, they can often result in similar forms of prejudice. They need to be tackled with the same vigour but they do not raise the same issues. Lord Rix expressed a strong hope that, on the commission, there will be someone who has knowledge, and possibly personal experience, of dealing with a mental handicap or disability.

Again, I appreciate that the Minister will not want to commit himself to turning the commission into a body that represents each and every separate form of disability, and that is reasonable. However, I hope that he will reflect on what Lord Rix had to say and recognise that there is an important distinction between physical and mental disability.

The commission will represent the 8.5 million people in this country who, according to the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), have a disability. It will be considered to be immensely important to them, and its 10 or 15 members will rightly receive a huge amount of publicity. They will be seen as spearheads—the vanguard—for the whole of the disabled community. There is a distinction between physical and mental disability, but both groups should be represented on the commission.

We need to look at the informative role of the commission in a little more detail. Earlier today, I consulted the rather good website put up by the National Disability Council at www.disability.org.gov.uk, which contains a lot of good material. The Minister would be the first to acknowledge that the internet is becoming a hugely significant source of information, particularly for people with disabilities, and plays a great role in the developing world of commerce. The commission will clearly be at the nexus of commerce and those with disabilities, so its internet commitment will be crucial.

I return to my point about the commission having a flying start. I hope that resources adequate for achieving a strong internet presence, from day one, have been identified in the set-up costs—we all know how websites can grow. It is difficult to update them, although that is the absolute priority. Those of us with parliamentary websites may think that they are terrific, but we may forget about them and, a few weeks later, people say, "Your website is a bit out of date." We must get the internet presence right at the start, and I hope that the Minister has something to say about that.

The commission must be seen to be concerned with the way for the future: although it is most definitely about tackling the prejudices and removing the oversights of the past, and improving the present, it has to be at the leading edge, making an exciting statement about the way that Britain sees itself on the threshold of the new millennium—and, I hope, a long way into it.

In that context, the Government—perhaps understandably, because, at this stage, they want to maintain a degree of flexibility for themselves—have been a little vague on the timing of the establishment of the commission. I understand that they hope that it will get going in 2000, but they have not yet committed themselves to a precise month or date. If the Minister wishes to correct me, I am more than happy to give way.

Ms Hodge: I have said on a number of occasions that I hope that the commission will open its doors for business in April 2000.

Mr. Collins: I am most grateful for that helpful intervention; with luck, we may be within 12 months of the start date.

The commission is to start up in the millennium year—in which we will all be very excited, for all sorts of reasons—so it is important that it gets a flying start and that its work, and the role of the disabled community, should be appropriately tied into the nation's millennium celebrations. I know that the Minister is not responsible for those matters, but we should think about using the dome to symbolise the fact that the Disability Rights Commission will be immensely significant for a large number of our fellow citizens. I hope that the Government will give some thought to that.

I want to enter a small caveat, but I hope that the Minister understands that it in no way diminishes my excitement about, and genuine commitment to, the principle behind the commission. Businesses, and small businesses in particular, could be a little concerned about the work of the commission, but I hope that she will be able to reassure me on that point.

On Second Reading in the other place, Baroness Blackstone explained that, to do its job effectively, the commission must stamp out discrimination and make sure that employers who act unlawfully are brought to book. She talked about the role of investigations. The commission will have teeth because it will be able to undertake investigations, and I welcome that. Baroness Blackstone said:

> "The investigations need to examine the structure of organisations so that they discover not only what discrimination is occurring, but why it happens. They need to deal with systemic as well as individual cases of discrimination."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 December 1998; Vol. 595, c. 1463.]

On one reading of Baroness Blackstone's remarks, I had no difficulty with them whatever. It is clearly likely that a prejudiced employer, or business, who discriminates against a person with a disability has done so in the past and would, unless stopped, do the same to others in future. If there is a pattern of discrimination, it needs to be tackled head on. However, I am a little concerned—I suspect that the business community might be as well—about exactly what scope the commission will have to investigate the structure of an organisation and what, in practice, that might mean.

For example, will the commission have the right to go into a factory employing 500 people to study a whole range of papers? What access will it have to information and what will happen in respect of findings of systemic discrimination? The Prime Minister yesterday expressed his wish, as Head of Government, to make sure that unnecessary regulatory burdens are not placed on business. We all feel—in principle, at least—that these regulations are not unnecessary, but, none the less, they must be considered in the overall context of businesses whose primary function is to make a living for themselves and for their employees.

[Mr. Collins]

We must ensure that regulation is conducted sensibly and flexibly and I welcome the fact that the Government have laid great emphasis in the drafting of the Bill on their wish to preserve flexibility for the commission. I also welcome their suggestion that they expect the commission to consult widely on its work and feed in its views as the Government consult on other issues.

It is important to get right the crossover between the world of commerce and the world of people with disabilities. I would not want the commission, as it starts up, to find itself opposed in any respect by any of the small business organisations, should they take against it because they think that it will impose regulations resulting in yet more inspections and all the rest of it, which they would oppose. If the Minister is able to give some assurance on that point, I would very much welcome it.

I enter only that small caveat and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead has said from the Front Bench, the Bill has been recognised as being significant. It builds on the landmark Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which was passed in the previous Parliament, and goes further. I hope and believe that it will not be the last word, either under this Government or under future Governments. This is a step-by-step process, and so it should be.

What is regarded as acceptable in the last year of the 20th century is a long way ahead of what would have been regarded as acceptable in the middle of this century, but perhaps a long way behind what will be regarded as acceptable in the middle of the next century. We need to move forward all the time and I welcome the Bill, which represents a large step forward.

I congratulate Ministers on being in office when the magic wheels stopped and, finally, both major parties recognised their mistakes and realised that they should be supporting such legislation. I hope that the Government will take it forward, work with all parties, make the commission a success and make us all proud of a society in which people with disabilities feel that they are entitled—and, as the norm, expect—to play their full part in that society, alongside all their fellow citizens.

2.59 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I warmly and enthusiastically welcome the Bill. I could not imagine such a debate being held five years ago, and I am absolutely delighted that it is taking place in such a spirit. Many of the debates in the Chamber seem to involve hon. Members on one side of the House believing that every single word of a Government Bill must be gospel truth, and hon. Members on the other side of the House believing that every word must be totally false.

I welcome the spirit in which the debate is being conducted. It represents a third way whereby we can all support the Bill enthusiastically, and for very good reasons, but recognise that reasonable people may raise issues for Ministers to consider in Committee or on Report. That, surely, is the way in which this issue, and many others, should be dealt with.

I congratulate both my right hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment on an admirable Bill. I also commend the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), now Minister for the Arts, who has been a passionate, committed and reasoned advocate of equal rights for disabled people for more years than I can recall. As the first Under-Secretary of State responsible for the issue, he set up a disability rights task force, produced a White Paper last summer and gained the well-deserved respect and admiration not only of hon. Members, but of disabled people throughout the country for ensuring that the Government's commitment to comprehensive and enforceable civil rights was put firmly on the agenda soon after the general election. Indeed, discussions with disability organisations commenced immediately after the election, and the task force was set up within months. The Ministers whom I have mentioned deserve our thanks for all they have done: I am very impressed by the way in which the Government have handled the issue so far.

There is no doubt that the 8 or 9 million disabled people in the country will warmly welcome the Government's commitment to the establishment of a Disability Rights Commission. That is much more important than my personal view. For the first time, disabled people will be able to fight their corner with the help of a statutory body. That is long overdue.

Although the fundamental purpose of the Bill is to provide a statutory body to enforce the rights of disabled people, it has another purpose. At present, employers who want to know what is required of them under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, or any other legislation that may be passed, have nowhere to go. Service providers—those who run superstores and supermarkets, and retailers of all kinds—want to know what the House expects of them, so that they can ensure that disabled people have equal rights. Those employers and service providers will be as enthusiastic as I am about the establishment of an authoritative body to which they can turn for advice.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister pointed out, it is no exaggeration to say that this is an historic day. The absence of a commission of this kind was undoubtedly one of the most significant flaws in the 1995 Act. I again congratulate the Government on acting so quickly to remedy the omission—and, indeed, on doing so with a degree of openness and transparency that could be emulated more widely. The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) mentioned the "disability on the agenda" website, which I believe belongs to the Department for Education and Employment. The website, which I use regularly, is a source of much useful information, including minutes of meetings of the disability rights task force. Not only have the Government established a task force to advise them—most of its members being disabled people—but they publish minutes of its meetings on the website. Such openness and transparency deserves congratulations, and I hope that it will be widely emulated.

I have referred briefly to the crucial role played by Ministers here in producing the Bill. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge also the work of my noble Friend Lord Ashley, who saw as long ago as 1983, when he introduced his first Bill, that without a commission of this kind civil rights for disabled people could not be secured. The need for such a commission was also recognised by my noble Friend Lord Morris and my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire

(Mr. Barnes) when they introduced Bills, and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) when he was a spokesman for the then Opposition. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for all that he did at that time.

I am delighted that the Opposition support the Bill, and I shall not undermine my genuine enthusiasm for the transformation that has clearly occurred by referring to past events. We should note that, over the years, the most important campaigners for civil rights have been disabled people themselves. I suspect that the present unanimity in the Chamber is due largely to the fact that disability organisations have pressed their case so effectively, especially through the umbrella organisation Rights Now!. We are where we are today because of that, and also because Members in all parts of the House have been prepared to listen to the campaign. It is especially important that Ministers have been so keen to listen, notably those in the Department for Education and Employment. I hope that the Government will be equally willing to listen when disabled people raise other issues with other Departments.

Let me say something about the details of the Bill. A powerful case for the establishment of a commission has always been that, as we already have an Equal Opportunities Commission and a Commission for Racial Equality, we should also have a commission to ensure that disabled people are not given second-class treatment. The National Disability Council recognised that case after its first year in operation. I suspect that hon. Members knew that before, but I congratulate the NDC, and in particular its chair, David Grayson. Its first annual report said to the Government, "We have a really good idea. Will you abolish us, and set up a commission in our place?". Notwithstanding the council's important work, it is impressive that it had the courage to make such a suggestion in its first annual report.

We can now contemplate the establishment of a state-of-the-art commission. We are able to draw on the experience of the EOC and the CRE, and we all agree that we want to do our best in setting up the new commission. The Government should, I think, consider strengthening a number of the measures in the Bill. I doubt that any of my suggestions will greatly surprise Ministers, as they have been well rehearsed in another place. Fortunately, however, the Government now have another opportunity to respond.

My overriding concern is to avoid litigation wherever possible. I say that as one who, like all other hon. Members who are present, is committed to the establishment of a Disability Rights Commission. That will necessitate a legal framework to ensure the guaranteeing of legal rights, but none of us wants cases to be dragged through the courts if that can be avoided. I think that we should facilitate early intervention when discrimination is imminent.

Written agreements provide an effective way of stopping unlawful practices in lieu of enforcement action. The Government have taken up recommendations from the CRE and the EOC that the commission should have the power to make written agreements with organisations that it suspects of breaching the law, rather than carrying out a formal investigation.

However, although clause 5 provides for such written agreements, it does not do so in the way recommended by the other commissions. I contend that, under the Bill, written agreements do not apply soon enough. According to the CRE, the key time for a written agreement is following the preliminary written inquiry before the start of the formal investigation. It is then that organisations suspected of being discriminatory start getting a little nervous and want to avoid bad publicity. It would help if a formal agreement could be entered into at that point rather than after a formal investigation, which may prove not to be necessary.

Clause 4 deals with non-discrimination notices. The power to include detailed provisions requiring a discriminator to change his practices in a particular way would be a useful addition to the Bill. The EOC and CRE have both made that point. Non-discrimination notices could specify the nature of the changes required and the time frame for their implementation.

During the debate in the other place, my noble Friend Lord Morris said that issuing a non-discrimination notice without a time limit is like having a car without an engine: it may look good, but it will not get us very far. I accept that the Government acknowledge the problem, and I do not claim that my point is original. The Bill provides for regulations, but why does it not grant these powers? What is the problem? Surely this matter is hardly controversial.

Mr. Oaten: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that the lack of a time scale is a weakness in the Bill. Further penalties would have to be imposed if the time scales were not adhered to, otherwise they would be constantly ignored and repeat notices would have to be issued. An additional penalty for not adhering to the time scale should be included in the Bill.

Mr. Berry: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comment. We should take as light an approach to this matter as is practicable, but we cannot have time limits without penalties for breaching them.

The Government have said that the Disability Rights Commission will be a state-of-the-art body. However, the Bill does not give it powers strictly equivalent to those of the EOC or CRE. Those bodies can take proceedings against discriminatory advertising, discriminatory practices, persistent discriminators and those who instruct others to discriminate. Apart from a power to initiate proceedings against discriminatory advertisements, none of those other powers are in the Bill, even though they have all proved useful to the other commissions.

The EOC and CRE review their relevant legislation from time to time. Hon. Members know that, because those bodies kindly write to us and tell us how they would like the legislation to be improved. In their reviews they have often called for additional powers to initiate proceedings. In the other place, the noble Lords did not attempt to include in the Bill all the powers that the other commissions have. They tried to achieve a more modest objective: to make available to the Disability Rights Commission a narrow but useful right to initiate proceedings if it would best assist disabled people.

Why should the Disability Rights Commission not be able to take up cases on behalf of disabled people, to relieve them of the stress of having to instruct a solicitor or of being seen to be taking action against an employer? The EOC wants to have that additional power in employment cases precisely because of workplace harassment. Disabled people are also likely to face those

[Mr. Berry]

problem. Both the existing commissions want the power to take class actions on behalf of others. My right hon. Friend the Minister referred to that, so I encourage him to consider this matter further. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission—the hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) may confirm this—can initiate proceedings in its own name. Why cannot the Disability Rights Commission do that?

On the Human Rights Act 1998, I welcome the Minister's recognition that this is an important issue. The Act is mentioned explicitly in the explanatory notes, which I have read with great care, but it is not referred to in the Bill. There is no good reason why it should not be in the Bill. Some disabled people are among the least able to assert their rights. People with mental health problems, in residential care or in prison may experience human rights abuses. Such abuses are covered by article 2 on inhuman and degrading treatment and by article 8 on the right to family life.

The Disability Rights Commission will only be as effective as the legislation it is empowered to enforce. You will be pleased to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I do not want to detain the House by going through many of my concerns about the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—suffice it to say that urgent changes are required. Let us not forget that it was produced on the hoof. The then Government brought more pages of Government amendments from the other place than there were pages in the original Bill. They had difficulty with the notion of civil rights. Happily, we are beyond that now, and I celebrate that. The genesis of the 1995 Act shows to anyone who is prepared to consider the matter that it should be radically changed.

Reference has been made to the small employers exemption. The costs of domiciliary care and related services that enable disabled people to live independent lives should also be viewed from a civil rights perspective, and that should be taken on board. There are also issues relating to education, transport and the police. I am aware that, following the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, the Government have expressed their intention to bring all aspects of the police's work under the Race Relations Act 1976, to enable the CRE to investigate possible discriminatory practices. I warmly welcome the Government's view on that, and I believe that the Disability Rights Commission should have similar powers. The police should not be subject to exemptions under any anti-discrimination legislation.

There is much yet to do. The commission will be the key to further progress. The chair of the commission will be a leader and a figurehead. By appointing a disabled person, the Government would be sending out a strong message, and it is extremely important that they do so.

Given the scale of discrimination faced by disabled people, a realistic level of funding is imperative. The £11 million figure is the figure for the CRE, minus £4 million. Ministers at the Department for Education and Employment will be pleased that I can do mental arithmetic—I can certainly do that simple calculation, although multiplication is much more difficult. I suspect that the Government have taken the figure for the CRE and subtracted £4 million—the fund for local race equality centres—to arrive at the final figure of £11 million. I could be wrong; those figures could be entirely coincidental. I am not arguing for the equivalent of local race equality centres, which do a marvellous job, but there will be a need for local, accessible, technical advice for disabled people, and the cost implications of that must be addressed.

The Government have taken a major and significant step to implement their election pledge of comprehensive and enforceable rights for disabled people. It should be welcomed with enthusiasm. Obviously, some areas of the Bill could be strengthened to make it state-of-the-art. I urge the Government to use the Committee and Report stages to do just that.

3.20 pm

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): May I say what a privilege it is to have a chance to speak in what is an important debate about rights for disabled people, and what a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), who has played such an important role in raising many of the issues and who made a thoughtful speech, which probably every Opposition Member can support.

The Liberal Democrats warmly welcome the Bill. The party has long felt that it was needed. It is an important step in establishing proper civil rights for disabled people. I believe that it is something that the Liberal Democrats have backed for many years, but I do not want to fall into the same trap as the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May)—I am sure that someone can find a quote in *Hansard* from way back to contradict me. The Bill goes a long way to meeting the new Labour Government's manifesto pledge, in which they said that the legislation was needed. It is nice to see politicians keeping their word.

I join in the tributes to Members, in this and the other place, for their years of work. That started long before I was elected to the House. They have done a massive amount of work and made many contributions. I also agree with the hon. Member for Kingswood: the work of the disability organisations is the reason why we have the Bill. In the two years that I have been a Member of Parliament, I have been enormously impressed by the quality of briefing and material from those organisations; it is second to none. Today we mark their efforts, as well as those of Members who have been mentioned.

It has been a good-natured debate. There is much harmony throughout the House. I was tempted to point out what is almost an anomaly—a Government who are strong on pushing forward such rights issues, but who may not be as robust as some of us would like on the benefits regime. The Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill is in Committee, where several of the concerns of disability groups have been raised about the impact of changes to the contributions mechanism for incapacity benefits, means-testing of incapacity benefits and individuals' pensions. However, given that this has been such a good-natured debate, I will not be tempted to go into those contradictions. I will just say that rights are important, but that the right to have enough money to live on is important as well. I hope that the Government will reflect on that point.

As we have heard, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 represents a missed opportunity fully to advance the rights of disabled people. That is why I am pleased that the Disability Rights Commission is coming into force. It will help to address many of the concerns that the Act fails to address.

I am encouraged that, over recent years, prejudice and discrimination against disabled people have decreased. Without wishing to re-open the Glenn Hoddle argument, the way in which the public and the national media responded showed how certain attitudes towards disabled people had changed in recent years.

Sadly, however, there is still a problem in that the majority of people, particularly employers, have many misconceptions about disabled people. The minute they think of disabled people, they assume that they are all wheelchair bound. They do not consider the problems that disabled people have with learning, or the difficulties of those with mental health problems. Throughout their life, one in four people may at times have a mental health problem. That is not understood by the public and employers. As the Minister said, many of those problems stem from ignorance. The commission will have a critical role in starting to educate those people. I was encouraged to hear the Minister say that there would be a hearts and minds campaign. I hope that that is not just another new Labour gimmick, but a positive move to improve information for employers and to build on the changing attitudes among the public.

I welcome the fact that the commission will have substantial powers to work towards eliminating discrimination, promoting equality, providing good-quality advice to employers and encouraging good practice. However, the commission will be effective only if it has the necessary powers of enforcement, good geographical access through regional offices and sufficient funding. If the commission does not have all those things, it will raise expectations that it will not be able to deliver. Above all, the commission will be as good only as the legislation that it is working with and its ability to enforce that. I shall touch on some of the failings of the Disability Discrimination Act and push the Minister to find out whether the Government will be able to move quickly on those issues even before the commission is established.

One concern that has already been touched on by hon. Members is in relation to the regulations under the Act and the exemption for small companies. It is of concern that the vast majority of companies are exempt. We could, as the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) tried to do, debate how many individual employees work for them. I am not sure whether his figures were accurate, but the vast number of companies are excluded under the Act.

The commission may embark on a hearts and minds campaign of its own, going around the country to educate people and encourage employers to realise that employing disabled people is a positive step for their company, and saying that the provisions of the Act are not that difficult for organisations to put into place. Its whole education programme will be undermined by the fact that the Government, by setting the threshold at 15 employees, have excluded many companies from the process. The clear signal that is sent is that the Act is complex and difficult, that we need time for it to bed in, and that the Government do not want to include all those companies because it might be difficult to enforce. It is counter to the signal that the commission will try to put across at all times.

It is time for the Government to move fast on the matter. Rather than waiting for the commission to take a decision on the issue—I hope that it is an early decision—the Government should move speedily, as they have already suggested they are minded to do, to reduce the threshold to two. That would give a positive boost to the commission before it starts and would reinforce many of the measures that the commission will put in place.

Clearly, some aspects of the Disability Discrimination Act need work. They include access to education, to transport, health and social services and, as the hon. Member for Kingswood said, the police. All those matters will require Government action if the commission is to be effective across the board.

I turn now to the mechanics of how the commission will operate. We have heard a fair amount from other hon. Members about funding. I have two concerns about funding. It is wrong to enter the debate by trying to play off one commission against another and saying, "If that commission receives X amount, the other should receive that amount." That is not the way things should be done.

I am concerned that the start-up costs for the Disability Rights Commission will be considerable. Much money will be needed for the organisation. That will be sapped quickly by all the regulations that will be required, producing information in a variety of formats, and getting fully accessible premises. Considerable investment will be needed to train staff in awareness and communications abilities, which will be needed to help the blind, the deaf, the deaf-blind and people with mental health problems.

The start-up costs will be considerable. I hope that the Minister will assure us that the £3 million figure that has been arrived at is based on considerable consultation with disability groups and has been thought through, taking into account the type of work and costs that will be involved. I hope that if, during the start-up process, it is discovered that additional money is required to make the commission effective, the commission will be able to go back to Government to get that money, rather than taking it from the £11 million that has been allocated for running the organisation in its first couple of years.

Although we have had some reassurance from the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities that the Government are prepared to review the budgeting process, I hope that we shall hear a little more from the Minister who is to reply to the debate about how they plan to consider the issues. As hon. Members, we should be able to consider the budget implications two or three years down the line. We should also be assured by Ministers that if a proper allocation of resources is not made, the Government will have the will to increase budgets, and that—even in a financially difficult period for the Government, either just before or after a general election—the Government will not find themselves unable to make those resources available.

There is a strong argument for saying that there should be the ability and systems in place to review not only funding and the other issues that we have debated today, but the mechanisms of the commission itself. Many of the concerns that have been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House have been about the effectiveness of some of the mechanisms provided in the Bill. We should be reassured that although the mechanisms would not necessarily be pilots, there will be the ability to change some of them if they are failing. I am thinking specifically of some of the inspection provisions.

In two years' time, if it turns out that inspections are simply not resulting in attitude changes, we will have to be able to reconsider the relevant provisions and decide

[Mr. Mark Oaten]

how to close some of the loopholes that undoubtedly will emerge. I shall welcome the Minister's views on the matter.

In the other place, there was much debate on the proportion of disabled people who should sit on the commission. I am grateful to note that the Minister, in opening the debate, gave some reassurances on that issue, and that there has been a change in the Government's attitude to it. Although the Bill will not include a firm commitment that the chairman should be a disabled person, I think that all hon. Members will have taken comfort from the very strong reassurances that the Minister gave.

I should say that I have probably changed my mind on the matter, and agree with the Minister that there are some problems with including such a requirement in the Bill. It might, for example, send conflicting signals on issues of equality and of jobs obtained on merit. Moreover, in different circumstances, the issues could be thrown back in our face by disabled groups. I am therefore minded to agree with the Minister on that point.

I should also add that although we have received good reassurances from Ministers, and there has been some talk about the importance of a disabled person being the first chairman, I hope that future Ministers—when current Ministers are promoted to greater things—will take a similar attitude when considering the appointment of new chairmen. I should welcome the Minister's view on how that could be achieved, although I do not know how it could be if it is not included in the Bill.

I should like to focus on the commission's investigation powers, which will require much more clarification. If the powers are to work effectively, they will have to be absolutely rigid; otherwise, the exercise will be abused by those wanting to bypass the regulations.

The commission will be able to initiate proceedings only on behalf of individuals, and not in its own name. I therefore share the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Kingswood and other hon. Members that the process could exclude some very important investigations that the commission may wish to make—simply because no organisation has clearly identified a specific individual, or, in other circumstances, because a specific individual feels very uneasy about demonstrating the courage to come forward and to be used as the focus of an investigation. In the next two or three years, there will undoubtedly be cases in which the commission is absolutely convinced that there is discrimination, but is unable to obtain an individual's agreement to deal with it. I should therefore be very grateful if the Minister would tell us how such circumstances will be tackled, so that the commission may act.

I also have some concerns about clause 4, which deals with non-discrimination notices. I should like there to be some protection for organisations that may be on the receiving end of non-discrimination notices, and should be grateful if the Minister would clarify the process by which notices are issued. If a notice is about to be issued to an organisation, there certainly should be some warning to the organisation that that is about to happen. The Audit Commission perhaps provides a model. Before it serves various notices within its power, it may provide a 14-day period in which it informs an organisation that action will be taken, thereby allowing any factual errors or misunderstandings to be dealt with immediately, rather than suddenly discovering that a non-discrimination notice containing errors has been publicly served. I should be grateful if the Minister would clarify that point, too. It is an important point of trust that organisations should have a quiet, private period in which to ensure that a discrimination notice is accurate, and such provision should be included in the Bill.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead made a very good point on the time period in which non-discrimination notices against a specific company should remain public. She was right to say that, if a company has put its house in order, there should be a time at which the non-discrimination order is either withdrawn or removed from the public database. I can certainly envisage situations in which a company changes management or ownership and subsequently becomes extremely positive on disability issues, although it has on its record a black mark that no longer has anything to do with that organisation, in which everything has since been put in order. I should certainly be grateful if the Minister would deal with that point.

Perhaps I have missed something in the Bill, but I wonder whether any organisations will be exempt from the process? I should welcome reassurances that everyone—Government bodies, other public bodies and church groups—will be subject to the process. I have not seen whether the Bill provides for any exemptions, but perhaps the Minister will put my mind at ease on the matter. I think that it would be wrong if there were exemptions, and cannot envisage any circumstances in which it would be right to allow them.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The hon. Gentleman has been dealing with clause 4. Paragraph 8(4) of schedule 3 states:

"The Commission may refuse to receive oral representations made on behalf of the person concerned by a person (not being counsel or a solicitor) to whom the Commission reasonably objects as being unsuitable."

How would the hon. Gentleman interpret "reasonably objects" and "unsuitable" in the case of someone who wants to give evidence on behalf of a person who has been accused?

Mr. Oaten: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which reinforces my belief that there should be a cooling-off period before a discrimination notice is issued, so that there may be a private dialogue to establish the facts. I should be concerned if, as has already been said, the commission had the power to refuse to enter into a dialogue. Perhaps the Minister will deal also with that specific point.

I should like to deal with another matter that concerns me, and to be clear about the commission's powers to act in a specific example that I shall give. I hope that the House will bear with me as I try to stumble through an explanation of the circumstances of a case in my own constituency.

About six months ago, Winchester city council received a sudden surge in planning applications—we received about 15,000 of them—for homes, and no one could quite understand why they were all being made. I shall not name the builder involved, but, once we made some initial contact, it became clear that the applications were being

made because the builder thought that, although he had no intention of building the homes for many years, lodging the applications was a way of avoiding observing the Government's changes to the building regulations, which have not yet been implemented. The builder therefore thought that, in four or five years' time, once the legislation had been implemented, he would not have to meet the new building regulations requiring full disabled access.

What powers will the commission have to step in in such circumstances? Will it have the power, for example, to take out an injunction against an organisation that is not committing a form of discrimination, but is engaged in the physical act of making an application or building a home that would fall foul of the commission's future objectives? Such acts would certainly seem to fall foul of some aspects of the legislation. I am not clear on how the commission's powers would operate in that example, in which a physical act or planning application is imminent which no number of non-discrimination notices will stop. Has any thought been given to whether additional powers are needed to take out injunctions to stop such activities?

The Liberal Democrats warmly welcome the Bill, which is long overdue and will be a major step forward in establishing civil rights. The point of my questions is not to be critical, but to make sure that the commission is successful. We do not want to have a debate in two or three years' time about how it has failed, how there have been no orders against individuals, how practice has not changed and how homes have been built without disabled access. That would set back so much of the progress that hon. Members have been trying to make for many years.

I hope that the Minister can deal with these issues and, above all, give the House a commitment that there will be a proper review of the effectiveness of the commission in two years' time so that we can iron out the problems and, we hope, come back and congratulate ourselves on the success of the commission.

3.41 pm

Ms Helen Southworth (Warrington, South): I join many of my right hon. and hon. Friends—and the one or two Opposition Members who are here—in welcoming the Bill. We have waited many years for legislation to give comprehensive and enforceable civil rights to disabled people.

I am a new Member of the House, and I have come here as a member of the Government party. Before that, I spent 18 years in community voluntary organisations, working with people with a disability. We attempted to undertake normal activities, and I want to describe the sheer frustration for people with a disability of making arrangements to live a normal life in what we would expect to be a normal society at the end of the 20th century.

Having decided to go somewhere, I have telephoned to check that the building is physically accessible because someone coming with us is a wheelchair user. I have been assured that it is, but arrived to find a series of steps to the room that we are to use; or to find that we cannot use necessary facilities, such as toilets, because of steps.

I have tried to make arrangements for transport and found that there is no public transport that can be used because of the disabilities of some people. I have found how extremely difficult and expensive it is to make arrangements to hire transport that is accessible. A person with disabilities needs sheer bloody-minded determination not to be left out of our society.

I have been turned away from places because I have been with people with learning disabilities, people who have mental illness or people who have a physical disability. That was not necessarily because people wanted to turn us away, but because they were not aware of the arrangements that were necessary to make their service accessible, or because they had not made the investments that were necessary to make their service accessible.

As I said, I worked for 18 years in community and disability organisations. A tremendous number of community organisations are making sincere efforts to remove barriers for people with disabilities from pubs, offices, houses, railway stations and bus stations, and to allow people who want to go to town to buy things to do so.

People in communities are working extremely hard to raise awareness, and to work with and to facilitate disabled people in playing a full part in our society.

There is not a disabled community out there. There are brothers and sisters, parents and children, and relatives and friends. We all want to be part of normal life. We want to make our towns, cities, schools and leisure facilities open to everyone and equally accessible. We want to go out and do things together.

Charities, good employers and businesses, individuals and groups have not been supported by the legislative framework, which has not worked. There has been good will in many places, but no infrastructure. There has been no inducement to change.

One of the clearest pictures that I had when listening to the debate was of a young man who is a wheelchair user explaining several years ago to a senior politician the experience of exclusion from employment. He was told that that could not be, because there was a Disability Discrimination Act; there was incomprehension from the politician. The young man knew that discrimination existed. He was an able young man, who was unable to find employment—and was desperate to find it.

Prior to the Government taking office, a deaf person in my constituency found that his employers sold the business, when the new employers did not allow him an interpreter during the contract negotiations in which his hours and conditions of employment were reduced.

There have been heroes in Westminster, such as Lord Morris of Manchester, Lord Ashley of Stoke, my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and the many other hon. Members that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) named. They were heroes to us out there, and they still are. They made slow, but determined progress.

When the previous Government—acting under duress—at last, and reluctantly, passed the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to outlaw discrimination, they did not create a commission to enforce the law. The Act was a vehicle without an engine. The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) did not gain much from sticking to his party rather than what he now says were his principles. He now has the double misfortune of being the Leader of the Opposition.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth)—as Under- Secretary—set up the disability rights task force, it was exceptionally welcome,

[Ms Helen Southworth]

not only in this House, but outside. It demonstrated the involvement of people with disabilities, and operated on the principles of inclusion and transparency. It involved people with different disabilities from different parts of the country.

I welcome the fact that the task force has brought a new attitude to the legislative framework of this country; a positive attitude that is promoting the rights of disabled people. That is a significant change. It is a gentle touch that will allow people to work effectively to try to achieve the society that we want—but it is able to take effective action against those who do not share that aim.

The Bill, which is receiving Government time, will be a vehicle by which many of the parts of the Government strategy can move forward. The new deal for disabled people will be supported by the Bill going through the House at the same time. It will open up fair opportunities to people with disabilities to gain and retain employment. It will be underpinned by guidance, good practice for employers and the ability to take enforcing action. We are not leaving disabled people to fight their own fights any more. They will have support from legislation.

I welcome the decision by Ministers that training in disabled awareness for benefits advisers will take place. I welcome also the openness of the Departments to learning and good practice as part of the process.

Ministers will know that I have met local organisations which work with disabled people in my constituency to discuss the issues. They asked me to raise the issue of education and gaining skills. In the past, too many people have not been able to achieve their potential because they have been excluded from educational opportunities. I hope that the commission will consider how to take that forward.

Others issues are important, such as the development of an integrated transport strategy that is accessible for everyone. Consumer rights and labelling are also important, as many people with disabilities—and hidden disabilities—find it crucial to know the ingredients in what they are to eat. I welcome the way in which the Government have taken those things into account across different Departments.

The commission will drive change. It has a style of inclusion and will involve people with a disability and those who have had a disability. They will have major representation. That is so important because, frequently, people with disabilities have been marginalised to such an extent that everyone knows what is best for them, and they are left to know how much they are excluded.

Some things can and must change rapidly although we all accept that others will take time. The commission will play a key role working with people who misunderstand, are embarrassed by, or have not had the opportunity to learn at first hand about, disability. They do not know what the barriers are or how to take them away.

The commission will work in a new way, solving problems through dialogue wherever possible, which is sensible and welcome. It will be very supportive of change. Many people want to make our communities inclusive and to address their own shortcomings but do not know how. It is about time that we gave them support.

The commission will have to tackle difficult issues and it must be fully empowered to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood spoke about policing. I want to add my voice to his. We must ensure that all aspects of policing, including the operation of statutory functions such as arrest and surveillance, are applied fairly and without prejudice. That is crucial to our civil society.

Some people with disabilities from time to time display symptoms that can make them look as though they are likely to cause difficulties and people can become disturbed by them. People with diabetes can sometimes appear to exhibit aggression when they are suffering from rapid blood sugar changes, and that can easily be misinterpreted. We must also give serious consideration to people with communication difficulties. They have not received all the support that they deserve from our police services.

I have noted that the task force is to consider the extension of the legislation to cover statutory police functions. That is very welcome and many of us look forward to hearing its proposals. It is also welcome that the powers of the commission will include human rights issues relating to disability.

The establishment of the commission must be effected so as to face the challenge of ensuring involvement and access for disabled people in all parts of the country. I know that Ministers will consider that seriously. I am confident that they will find a way of delivering, but they must ensure that people from every part of Warrington, as well as every part of Westminster, get access to the commission and to the opportunities that it will afford.

The commission will be a radical engine for change. It will open up a lot of challenges and many of us will have to face questions with which we might not be comfortable, but it has to work effectively to fulfil the aspirations of hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities and the hundreds of thousands more who are perhaps only temporarily not disabled. I warmly welcome the Bill and I look forward to its taking effect.

3.53 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Member for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth) referred to personal experience and the human aspects as well as to the whole concept of the environment. We have not developed that sufficiently over the years, as our legislation for the built environment has often not been complied with when new buildings have been put up. There is no excuse for that, although I can understand some delays in modernising old buildings, some of which may not be as amenable as others to the work.

I welcome the Bill as a further advance. I know that there have been criticisms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. At the time, some hon. Members wanted to vote against it because it did not give us everything that we wanted. Even today, it has been acknowledged that this Bill is merely one more step. We must go step by step and make progress towards further legislation.

The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) has come in for some criticism, but I must at least pay tribute to him for introducing the Bill that became the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. He had not won the battle either with the Treasury or—dare I say it?—with the Northern Ireland Office. Northern Ireland was again excluded. In fairness, when we pressed the issue, he ensured that there was legislation for Northern Ireland.

Fascinatingly, the only reference to Northern Ireland in the Bill concerns eligibility for membership of the House or of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It says that membership of the Disability Rights Commission is a bar to membership of either of those bodies. I am aware of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to which the Minister and the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), my friend of long standing in this campaign, referred. I am not convinced that the same thrust of legislation is contained in that Act, bearing in mind that there is already a debate about whether one commission can deal with all the various aspects that are dealt with here by several commissions.

When will Northern Ireland have a commission with the same powers as the commission in Great Britain? The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) will remember that in 1986 he promoted a private Member's Bill, of which I was one of the sponsors, but the legislation was not allowed to be extended to Northern Ireland. In 1989 I was fortunate enough to draw the 11th place in the ballot and we managed to pilot through legislation for Northern Ireland on that occasion.

I remind the House that part of the declaration of human rights is that every citizen should have the same rights, so those in Northern Ireland should have all the rights that the citizens of England, Scotland and Wales have. People involved in disability needs in Northern Ireland have been consistent in campaigning for the Bill and in working to improve the lot of people with either overt or covert disabilities and seeking to give everyone the same standing.

I trust that, if the legislation has to be effected by the Northern Ireland Assembly, which, unlike the Welsh and Scottish Assemblies, does not start until the middle of 2000 at the earliest, we will not again be disadvantaging people in Northern Ireland.

I welcome the Bill as a further step towards freedom for people with disabilities. From boyhood, I have been aware of disability. My mother's cousin—we called her Aunt Nancy—was blind. She worked in a workshop for the blind. She never liked living in the hostel for the blind. She was a beautiful musician, a singer and a pianist. My brother and I would meet her every Friday night to take her to our home. With the mischievous approach of boys, we could not understand how a person who could not see could get around. We regularly tried tricks on her. Sometimes we stopped short and sometimes we went past the house. Never once did she miss a beat. She was able to correct us and say, "A little bit further," or "You've gone past it."

I have been aware of disability at other levels. Sometimes people do not realise that none of us is perfect and that we all have some measure of disability. It may not be noticeable now, but it might be before we get much older. That is the sense in which we must continue getting across to people the concept of disability. Original sin was mentioned earlier. It was not invented in the House, but it is sometimes still evident in the House, in the way in which we treat people who are different from us.

We have spoken about the effect on employment and businesses of disability discrimination legislation. We in Northern Ireland do not consider it right that small businesses are excluded. When the matter was discussed previously, the employers forum was adamant that the legislation should apply across the entire sector, especially because in Northern Ireland, unlike other parts of the Kingdom, small businesses employ a much greater percentage of labour than large businesses. I hope, therefore, that if legislation is needed to cover those who should be employed in small businesses, it will be forthcoming.

We recognise that there are certain jobs that certain people cannot do. Whether or not we have physical or mental abilities, some of us are not equipped to do certain jobs. We are not arguing that people should get a job because of a specific disability. We have acknowledged that we want the chair and the vice-chair of the commission to be appointed on merit. Some people with particular disabilities might outshine some of us who think that we are not disabled.

I wonder to what extent the Bill will apply to Government Departments. I was glad to hear that Ministers had at last won the battle with the Treasury. That has been the problem all along. Step by step, money is to be released from various Departments. However, it is not right that we should wait another four years to deal with the supply of goods and services. That is where discrimination is often most severe, and I shall give two simple examples to illustrate the point.

I recognise that the public purse, like all our purses, is not bottomless. Judgments must be made. I am thinking of a home that I visited last Saturday, for which we have been trying to get alternative heating for at least two years. One of the residents is 93 years of age and blind. The other, her sister, is 84 and suffers from severe osteoporosis.

We finally won the argument that there should be alternative heating. The best would have been oil. We were told that that was not possible, but we have not discovered why. Only last week, the women were told that an application had been made for gas, but as there was no connection at the front of the house, they could not have gas. The women had never asked for gas, because the nearest gas supply point is more than two miles away. Those in the Housing Executive and the occupational therapy department are using such reasons for not supplying the alternative fuel that is needed to care for two folk who, in my judgment, deserve it.

I think of another case in which an application had been made for the provision of downstairs accommodation, including a toilet, for a woman who had been healthy until about 10 years ago. For the past 10 years, owing to debilitation and loss of limbs, she has been confined to an upstairs room. I was utterly amazed to discover that the occupational therapist who was sent to examine the room tried to find ways of avoiding the provision of such accommodation—that is the kindest way that I can put it. It was only when my constituents argued the case that officials began to speak of criteria, which had not been mentioned previously.

It seems to me that in both cases, the criteria were financial. If we continue to discriminate against our citizens because we claim that we cannot afford to meet their needs, the ablest in society will be allowing the weakest to bear the greatest pain. I am glad to welcome the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission, so that it might get on with its work.

I make one proviso, to which I alluded in my question to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten). We all know that legal proceedings and appeals cost money. If a

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

tribunal is set up, it must be paid for. For benefit appeals, no money will be available. If a person employs a solicitor, that must be at his own expense. People rely on the few solicitors who work for the public good, on trade union officials and sometimes on Members of Parliament, who try to help as a service to their constituents. We must be careful not to impose more costs on the system than the commission considers reasonable. The same clause allows for the assistance of a solicitor or counsel, and I cannot imagine many of them practising without pay.

4.7 pm

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): It was in 1988, at my first Labour party conference in Blackpool, that I first spoke to a large audience about the need for civil rights for disabled people. I believed then, as I do now, that disabled people would never be able to play their full part in society, never be fully accepted and never have equality of opportunity until we had equal rights with everyone else in society.

In those days I had no idea that I would ever reach these heady heights. I had no ambition to seek election to this place. That was for other people, not for people like me. I saw my role in persuading others of the strong case for civil rights legislation, but it would be up to others to enact that legislation.

Hon. Members can therefore imagine my pride in being in the Chamber today, speaking on the Second Reading of the Disability Rights Commission Bill, which will lay the foundation that will underpin the changes necessary to stop disabled people being treated as second-class citizens.

I have left it to others this afternoon to discuss the need for such legislation—the flaws in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the powerlessness of the National Disability Council set up by the DDA, the need for a body that can take through the courts cases of discrimination against disabled people, and the need for good information for service providers and employers. Those are the academic arguments. There is an injustice in this country, and the Bill is the beginning of our efforts to right that injustice.

What I can add to the debate is not based on intellectual argument or high-flown ideals. I can describe my experiences in day-to-day life that illustrate the extent of discrimination faced by disabled people, day in and day out. Let me give hon. Members some examples of how it feels to be at the receiving end of the ignorance and prejudice that exist. It is all very well to talk about things in the abstract, as we have been doing this afternoon. I hope that I can evoke for hon. Members some of our feelings.

People who use a wheelchair become obsessed with toilets. On a number of occasions it has been difficult to find one, so I choose where I go carefully. Although I am blessed with a fairly strong bladder, thank goodness, on occasion it is important that there is a toilet. I remember some years ago when I went to a Chinese restaurant in my constituency. It was chosen because it had a disabled person's toilet. After a nice meal we went to the toilet, as one does after a few drinks or so. Imagine my surprise when I opened the door of the disabled toilet to find it full of furniture. Feeling a bit puzzled, I went off to complain. I found the manager whose reply was, "We're very busy. It's a Saturday night and you didn't tell us you were coming." Next time hon. Members book a table in a restaurant, imagine not only booking a table but having to say, "By the way, I might want to use your toilet." The farcical nature of that helps to illustrate the difficulty. I have found all sorts of things in disabled toilets. I think it was at the BBC Aberdeen that we had to shift out a barbecue and wellingtons a few minutes before I was to go on air so that I could go to the toilet. That is what can happen with accessible toilets, but imagine what it is like not to be able to get to the toilet at all.

Then there was the time when I was standing for election to the council. I was standing in one ward in Brechin, where I lived at the time, and I had to vote in another ward. I arrived at the appropriate polling station wearing my big red rosette for the Labour party to find no other people wearing big red rosettes. All I could see were people wearing blue rosettes. There were three steps into the polling station. I was on my own. Consternation ensued. I realised that I had to swallow my pride and ask the Tories to carry me in. Luckily, they did this with a degree of good will. Brechin is a small town and I knew them well. Just to be on the safe side, I thought to ask the SNP to carry me out again. If hon. Members can imagine the indignity that disabled people have to face in being carried in and out of a polling station, they will get some sense of how awkward life can be.

I have many such stories of what has happened to me. I wish also to show that such things happen constantly, so I shall give just two examples from this week. At the beginning of the week I arrived on the plane from Aberdeen and waited at Heathrow for the taxi driver to pick me up and bring me here. He had my name and knew that I was in a wheelchair. I was sitting waiting when a driver from the company that I use walked past me. Hon. Members can imagine the consternation of the complete stranger standing beside me when she was asked if I was Anne Begg. She was completely puzzled until I put the driver right. That happens all the time. For disabled people outside, it may be worth remembering that no matter how famous or well-known one thinks one is, all disabled people suffer from the "Does she take sugar?" syndrome. Constantly, complete strangers who just happen to be near me are asked by other complete strangers whether I can manage or not. These are small examples of how ridiculous the attitudes are that lead to discrimination against disabled people.

My second illustration from this week concerns the census form that I received as part of the pilot census. I assume that all hon. Members know that there is to be a full-scale census in the year 2001. In some parts, a number of households have been chosen to receive the pilot census form. One duly arrived through my door and, being a good citizen, I filled it out. I came across a question that is obviously geared to judging how many people in Britain have a disability. The question is:

"Do you have any long term illness, health problem or disability which limits your daily activities or the work you can do?".

There is a yes and a no box. I did not think much about it, but got on and ticked the no box.

My disability does not interfere with my job. I hope that I am as successful a Member of Parliament as anyone else in this House. I hope that I was as successful a teacher as any other. I am fairly sure that my right hon. Friend

the Secretary of State for Education and Employment would also tick the no box indicating that he did not have a disability that limits his daily activities or the work that he can do. He is a successful Secretary of State and member of this Government, enacting worthwhile legislation. Who on earth, then, is meant to tick the yes box? Perhaps my mum should. She does not actually have an illness, a health problem or a disability, but she has never learned to drive. She relies on my father to drive her around. That limits her daily activities considerably. Perhaps she might tick the yes box, but she would not class herself as being disabled, ill or having a health problem.

Several hon. Members in the House this afternoon, including me, wear specs. If we had a burning ambition to be a pilot or to do some other job that required A1 sight, I am sure that we would all be discriminated against because we wear specs. In other words, that would be classed as a disability. Yet I do not suppose that hon. Members believe that they have a disability. Someone with specs might possibly tick the yes box.

It is not the disability that is the problem. It is not my disability that stops me playing an equal part in society. It is the fact that some people have put steps in buildings, so that I cannot get into them. If there are two buildings side by side, one with steps and the other fully accessible, there are no limitations to what I can do in the fully accessible one, but I am disadvantaged and discriminated against if I want to get into the building with steps.

We should never blame disabled people for problems that society has created. It is society that has created physical barriers and it is attitudes within society that cause the problem, not the disability. I hope that when the Home Office gets my letter of complaint, it will consider changing that particular question on the census. I am not sure how, but I hope that it will, in time for the census in 2001.

The discrimination faced by many disabled people can have a far more serious impact on their life than the minor daily irritations that I have just described. While I face inconvenience, annoyance and frustration, I have been lucky to be able to overcome the barriers that could have seriously impeded my life. Eventually I became a teacher, although there was a doctor at the college of education who seemed hellbent on preventing me. I hope that I was a successful teacher, despite having a disability far more profound than it was when I first went to see the doctor as a 17-year-old.

I have managed to lead an independent life. I have a car with a great machine that stores the wheelchair on the roof. In that way the barrier of a lack of transport and of motability has been overcome for me. Ultimately, I have been lucky to have been elected to this House, and that the attitudinal problems that exist in political parties and society as a whole did not count against me when I stood to be selected for Aberdeen, South. For the majority of people with disabilities, the barriers, both physical and attitudinal, are far too high to overcome. They are not in work although they could quite easily work. They do not lead a fulfilling life although there should be nothing to stop them doing so. We can only guess what talent goes to waste because of discrimination against, and lack of opportunity for, people with disabilities. Society would be richer if all citizens could play their full part in our society.

We are never going to be happy; we will always look for more. I look forward to the time when I can visit all my constituents because all private dwellings are wheelchair accessible. That is a long way off, but we have made a start in changing part M of the building regulations in England and Wales—part T in Scotland. I look forward to being able to travel by train on my own without having to book ahead and a guarantee that the toilets will work—toilets again. I look forward to the time when I can take it for granted that if I go to a restaurant or pub, there will be a disabled toilet that I can enter without falling over furniture. I look forward to the time when every shop in Union street in Aberdeen is wheelchair accessible so that I get in and do my shopping like everyone else.

I look forward to a time when I will not be called a wheelchair. The last time that it happened was in the embassy in Washington. A young chap said, "We'll get the wheelchair into the lift and the others can follow." I am afraid that I get very facetious in such circumstances, and say, "Why? Am I not going up too?" I could go on and on.

Of course, it will take time. The Disability Rights Commission will take time to work through the discrimination that has always existed. This is the first step, the underpinning. Some Opposition Members probably did not realise that they were using the Scottish Labour slogan for the Scottish election campaign when they talked about going step by step. In my case, it should perhaps be move by move. We will eventually have full equality of opportunity and comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people. The Bill is the basis on which we will build. Waiting for attitudes to change through gentle persuasion has not worked. The Bill will force the pace and help disabled people who wish to challenge the discrimination that they face daily. Disabled people like me welcome this Bill, which I urge the House to support wholeheartedly.

4.23 pm

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I do not know what I have done to incur your displeasure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I must have done something to deserve punishment. How can I follow my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg)?

I welcome the Bill for several reasons. While the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is not worthless without such legislation, it is much devalued. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) said, that Act has many failings, but the biggest failing was that it did not introduce a Disability Rights Commission. That view is now shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It certainly was not before.

The Disability Discrimination Act made it illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities, but there was no real mechanism for doing anything about it. If a council, multinational company or Department discriminated against someone, that person could do nothing. Individuals cannot take on big organisations. People had rights but could not exercise them. Rights that cannot be exercised are not rights. People had rights in theory only. I hope that the Bill will mean that people have rights in practice.

The Bill will not end discrimination against people with disabilities or change people's attitudes at a stroke. It will not be the final legislation on discrimination against

[Mr. John Heppell]

people with disabilities, but it is a step in the right direction. It is important to recognise that. We struggled so long to achieve the Disability Rights Commission that we have almost started to regard it as an end in itself. People think that once we have it, everything will be rosy. That is not the case. Anyone who believes that we can forget about disability, relax and sit on our laurels because a Labour Government have introduced a commission is wrong.

The commission is only the beginning. The Disability Discrimination Act was a step in the right direction, partly because it was much amended by the then Opposition, with the help of many disabled organisations. The Bill, too, is such a step. That is why I am not so concerned about some of the details. I see no compelling reason why employers should be outside the Act because they employ fewer than 15 people, any more than I could see a compelling reason for the figure to be 20. Legislation could be framed to include all employers. I am not too worried that that is not in this Bill.

Similarly, I am not sure about the funding. I want to be persuaded that there is enough money to ensure that we do things properly. Introducing written agreements earlier seems sensible, but I am not worried if it is not in the Bill. Once the commission is established, it will be able to consider such things itself. It will help shape future changes by advising the Government on how to amend the Disability Discrimination Act and on what else needs to change. I fear that we could fall into the trap of trying to do the commission's job for it by putting everything in the Bill when such matters should be considered by it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood rightly said that the Disability Discrimination Act was designed on the hoof. I fear that we might end up designing the commission on the hoof. That would be a bad example to follow—although I can think of even worse ones. Hon. Members will remember how everyone thought that all the ideas for the Child Support Agency were great. There was not much debate, but it seemed sensible, so away we went. I may be thought over-cautious, but considered views from the commission before we move forward might be a good thing.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) quoted a part of the Confederation of British Industry brief that showed it to favour the Bill strongly. A few paragraphs on, the CBI expressed real concerns and seemed suspicious of the direction in which the commission was heading. We must do our best to dispel such mistrust. The legislation must work for people with disabilities, but it must also work for the rest of the community, including the business community. I am not apologising for the CBI, but if we can get consensus, it is well worth doing.

I am particularly pleased that the commission will have a majority of disabled people on it. When I read that, it made me think of a few years back when, in another life, I was a county councillor. I was chair of the equal opportunities committee. I got involved in a controversial problem. People will be amazed to learn that a deaf school would not allow the children to sign, even at playtime. The people who served the meals were told that the children had to keep their hands at their side. They were not allowed to sign to each other. I may be getting a little long in the tooth, but we are not talking about Dickensian times. It was just a few years ago. I went to a meeting called at the local Deaf Society by the parents of the deaf children, many of whom were deaf themselves. I heard them putting their views forcefully. They wanted their children to be able to communicate not just at school but back at home, with them. I also listened to the professionals saying why they did not allow the children to sign at the school.

I came to one conclusion. If you want to know anything about deafness, ask deaf people. If you want to know anything about disability, ask people with a disability. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South has demonstrated that today with her speech. We cannot do better than listen to the people who know what it is like to live with the problems day by day.

I am proud that a Labour Government have introduced a Disability Rights Commission with an enormous and powerful role. It will work towards the elimination of discrimination against disabled people and promote equality of opportunity for them. It will assist people in taking cases forward. I agree with what the hon. Member for Maidenhead said about consensus. If we can work by consensus and conciliation, great, but the truth is that it is difficult to reason with prejudice. Prejudice defies logic. There will be times when we have to resort to the legislation. Individuals cannot do that on their own, without the help of the commission. The Bill is an enormous step forward. It will make it more likely that conciliation and voluntary agreements will work. People will know that there is a stopping point at the end.

The commission will prepare codes of practice and guidance. It will arrange for independent conciliation. It will also provide information and support to employers and others. That has been a problem in the past. Some people discriminate just through ignorance. If there is better understanding of the problems, there will not be so much discrimination. I am pleased and proud that I am part of a Government who are making that possible.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead annoyed me a little when she said that before the election the Labour party's view had been that there should be no small employer threshold. She implied that disabled people were disillusioned; that they felt that now the Labour party was in government its views had changed and that they felt let down. I do not believe that that is the case. In our 1997 manifesto, we said:

> "We will seek to end unjustifiable discrimination wherever it exists. We support comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or at work, developed in partnership with all interested parties."

Just before the election, I attended a disabled people's group, as a poor substitute for my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke). I told them what the Labour party's policy was, and that we would introduce a commission. The members of the group were sceptical. It was a case of, "Oh, yes, we have heard this before. This is before the election. Wait until after the election." After the election, I still faced a fair amount of scepticism, because we could not legislate for everything in the first few months. There was a feeling in many disabled organisations that the legislation was never going to materialise.

In the Labour party we used to have a real problem with what was called the militant tendency. That has well and truly gone now, but we sometimes have a problem with what I like to term the Monty Python tendency.

Members of my party say, "What are you going to do about pensioners?" I say that we are trying to introduce half-fare bus passes, that we have cut VAT on fuel and that we have given them £100 towards their fuel bills. So they say, "Yeah, yeah, but what about nursery education?" I say that we are guaranteeing a nursery place for every four-year-old. They say, "Yeah, yeah, but what about schools?" I say that we are trying to cut class sizes. So it goes on. I am sure that the Monty Python tendency does not exist among disabled groups because they can see that since May 1997, the Government have set up the disability rights task force, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth). In some respects, my hon. Friend demonstrated his principles more than anyone under the previous Government by the tremendous decision that he made in reaction to what the Tory Government were doing to disabled people. We are making progress now with the Disability Rights Commission Bill. We are implementing new rights of access. We have extended the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to employers with 15 rather than 20 employees. We have announced £195 million for the new deal for disabled people.

Mrs. May: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's points in response to my comments about disappointment among disabled organisations about certain aspects of the Government's policies. I suggest that he looks at the disability audit conducted by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation. In its general comment on its overall finding, it said:

"Disabled people feel broadly pleased with the Labour Government's policy on civil rights, but are worried by welfare reform and by other issues which have less of a public profile."

I did not see the hon. Gentleman at the disability organisations' lobby of Parliament in Westminster Hall before Easter. I apologise to him if he was there, but if he had attended he would have heard some real concerns expressed by disabled people about certain aspects of his Government's policy.

Mr. Heppell: I was not at the lobby. Things may have been said there.

Mr. Levitt: My hon. Friend will be aware that the RADAR's audit was carried out almost a year ago.

Mrs. May: No.

Mr. Levitt: It was September. It highlighted issues of major concern to disabled people, many of which related to welfare reform. That was at a time when there were misleading press stories about welfare reform going round and before the Bill was published. If my hon. Friend was at the briefing meeting organised by the disability organisations yesterday, he would have found 99 per cent. satisfaction with the proposals as stated—and the 1 per cent. of concerns were dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Minister in his opening speech.

Mr. Heppell: I accept that many of the disabled organisations were concerned about what they perceived to be Government policy when we first came to power, but they have realised that the perception was not the reality. Disabled people are becoming better-off under a Labour Government.

We have set up a £30 million fund to help disabled people who want to work and provided £375 million for social services to meet the needs of disabled children. We have introduced the disabled persons tax credit guarantees, with a minimum income of £150 a week, and the incapacity benefit safety net. The special educational action plan is supported by £55 million and we have abolished the means test for allowances for disabled students in higher education. I honestly do not think that anyone is going to say, "What did the Romans ever do for us?"

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Maidenhead and her colleagues now welcome the Bill, but I will not allow them to rewrite history. That is what they are trying to do today. The reality is that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was brought in under protest. The Tories effectively crumbled because public opinion was so strongly against them—disability groups were fighting against them on a common front and the Labour Opposition gave them a fair amount of trouble almost every day. However, even when the Bill was finally introduced, every concession made by the Conservative Government had to be torn from them in Committee. The Bill that was originally published by the Tories was radically changed during the Committee stage as a result of the hard work of the Labour Opposition and, to be fair, that of Liberal Democrat colleagues.

No one will forget the former Member for Sutton and Cheam and her machinations to try to destroy civil rights for disabled people. No one will forget the Ministers who effectively fell because of the blatant, political way in which they were prepared to use the issue of the civil rights of people with disabilities. Nor will anyone forget people such as my hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood, for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston, Lord Morris or Lord Ashley, who struggled for all those years.

I conclude by returning to the point with which I started. The Bill is a step forward, but it is not the end. The DDA was a step forward and the Bill is a much greater step, but there is still a long way to go. Let us hope that the Government will take us along that road.

4.42 pm

Ms Linda Perham (Ilford, North): Several of the speakers who preceded me have paid tribute to hon. Members who have campaigned on behalf of disabled people for many years. It was a delight to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg); she is a powerful example of the importance of disabled people being included in all aspects of life and society, and of the crying need to change attitudes. We listened with humility to her account of her experiences of discrimination; we are extremely fortunate to have her among us.

I am pleased to give a warm welcome to the Bill, as other hon. Members have done. Its provisions will also please the many excellent organisations that work on behalf of people with disabilities in my constituency and in the London borough of Redbridge. My connection with disability groups goes back to my days of service as a member of Redbridge community health council in the mid-1980s. Since then, as a local councillor, especially as mayor of the borough in 1994-95, and now as a Member

[Ms Linda Perham]

of Parliament, I have continually been reminded—as, I am sure, are all hon. Members—of the consistent and continuing commitment of everyone involved in campaigning for disabled people's rights, by contacts with, and visits to, many of the groups run by dedicated volunteers.

I want to acknowledge and pay tribute to the work in my own borough of the Redbridge Disability Association, the Redbridge Multiple Sclerosis Society, Redbridge Mencap, the East London handicapped adventure playground and the Redbridge Crossroads respite care scheme. There are many other examples of such groups and I am sure that there are similar groups in the constituencies of other hon. Members.

Support for a Disability Rights Commission has come from many national disability organisations, a number of which have provided help and information to Members of both Houses of Parliament during the Bill's passage so far. That point was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten). There have been briefings from Scope, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, Leonard Cheshire—which has an inspired head of policy in John Knight, with whom I have had the pleasure of working during several years—and the Royal National Institute for the Blind.

My local area is especially fortunate in that some very active organisations for the visually impaired are based there; for example, the Ilford Blind Welfare Association, Focus for the Visually Handicapped, the Essex Voluntary Association for the Blind and the Guide Dogs for the Blind, which has its national headquarters in my constituency at Woodford Bridge.

If not disabled ourselves by birth, accident or illness, at some time in our lives all of us have contact with someone who has a disability. My grandfather was blind in one eye from the age of 21 and completely lost his sight at the age of 64, shortly before he retired. My father and my mother-in-law have hearing difficulties, and my best friend died at the age of 34 from the effects of multiple sclerosis.

The Disability Rights Commission will be a powerful champion to combat centuries-old discrimination against disabled people and the disgraceful denial of equal opportunities. As detailed in clause 2, the commission will encourage good practice, give advice to Ministers and to Government agencies, provide information and support, carry out research—that is most important—keep the DDA under review and, as has been mentioned, under clause 3, it will be able to conduct formal investigations.

I want to touch on three matters of concern that may limit the potential benefits of the Bill to promote justice and fairness for people with disabilities. First, in relation to clause 2(4), although I accept the necessity for the commission to limit its claim on the public purse and to place a tangible value on the services and facilities that it provides, I am anxious that some disabled people might not be able to pay such charges. For that group, access to the full range of services and protections of the commission could be denied. That would run counter to the spirit of the Bill.

Many disabled people are not in waged employment, although obviously I welcome the measures outlined by my right hon. Friend the Minister in his opening remarks to remedy that. However, many disabled people on a limited or reduced income, with extra costs arising from their disability, might find it extremely difficult to pay for facilities and services. I ask that a requirement be placed on the commission to consider those issues when its members develop a charging policy for the provision of services and facilities.

The second issue relates to the recovery of expenses, covered in clause 7(2) and (3). Following the acceptance of principles supporting financial prudence and accountability, I support the need for the commission to recover the costs it incurs by providing assistance to individuals under clause 6. However, I am concerned that any financial benefit awarded to a complainant could well be lost under the powers proposed in clause 7(2) to recover

"A sum equal to any expenses incurred by the Commission"

as a first charge. For example, if a disabled person were to be awarded a sum of £1,000 for injured feelings, following a humiliating refusal of service in a restaurant, but there was a complicated defence by the proprietor resulting in costs to the commission of £950, the net benefit to the complainant would be £50. Again, that seems to run counter to the spirit of the Bill. I urge the Government to set a maximum limit on the level of costs that can be recovered, so that the benefits of any award to the complainant are preserved.

The third issue relates to membership of the commission. I welcome the proposal that more than half the commissioners will be disabled persons or persons who have had a disability, as that will allow the commission and its activities to benefit from personal experience of disability. I am keen that that vital tranche of the commission's membership should be made up of people who have, or have had, personal experience of disability, as opposed to persons who are the parent or guardian of a disabled person, something that can be seen in the membership of both the National Disability Council and the disability rights task force. That will allow the personal testimony and experience of disabled people to guide, through their majority, the work and future direction of the commission. I support the bridges contained in the proposals for membership of the commission between those with and those without personal, individual experience of disability. Those provisions will bring together a broad force of joint experience and endeavour to make the commission work.

As one who campaigns against age discrimination, as my right hon. Friend the Minister knows well, I hope that, in the not-too-distant future, an equalities commission will be established to cover all aspects of discrimination. After all, a disabled person may also face discrimination on the grounds of gender, race or age. However, for now, it is my pleasure to support the creation of the Disability Rights Commission. It is yet another manifesto promise delivered by this Labour Government, who are determined to give disabled people the dignity that they deserve with comprehensive and enforceable civil rights.

4.50 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I do not usually display euphoria about legislation—not even when a Labour Government introduce it—and I often find something I can carp or be grumpy about, or areas where changes can be made. However, I am enthusiastic about

this Bill. I feel like a Manchester United supporter will feel after last night's result; or like a supporter of Sunderland, which I am, whose team has just won promotion, which it has. I feel like that because, now that this Bill has been introduced, I believe that we are—at last—getting there, just as Manchester United will feel that it is getting there because it has reached the final, even though it has not yet played it.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister said, the Bill is a crucial staging post on the way to wider ends. The end legislative goal must be full civil rights for disabled people, but, even when we have full civil rights for disabled people and a commission that works to enforce those rights, we will not have solved all the problems of discrimination. The legislative tools we use only enable us to begin the work. Nevertheless, the Bill represents a crucial step in the right direction; it is a measure for which I, and other hon. Members—especially Labour Members—have been arguing for a long time, and it is perceived as a key part of the development of fuller rights.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has been mentioned repeatedly. That was an inadequate, restricting and grudging piece of legislation, although I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) said about that Act's being changed fantastically as it went through the House. It turned out to be a far better piece of legislation when it left the House than it was when it was introduced, and a great deal has been done since to make the most of its provisions. Labour Front Benchers deserve credit for having acted on the existing measures so as to achieve the most that they could.

Let us remember that the amendments proposed as that legislation passed through the House—especially the key amendment, which we knew would achieve the most, to set up the Disability Rights Commission—were opposed all down the line. Those amendments were opposed in Committee, on the Floor of the House on Report and in the House of Lords. It should not be forgotten that the person who was involved in running the campaign to block those radical changes to what became the Disability Discrimination Act was the current Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). At that time, he was the junior Minister piloting the Bill, and his promotion through the ranks of the Conservative party depended on his ability to deliver.

The legislation had been introduced only reluctantly, because of trouble the previous year with the private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), which had been blocked repeatedly as it passed through it stages in the House. The following year, I was lucky enough to be able to introduce my own version of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. That Bill was eventually allowed into Committee, after all sorts of devices had been used to prevent its getting there. Although that Committee had a Conservative majority, I was able to suggest the appointment of certain Conservative Members who I knew would be willing to support the legislation. In fact, in Committee, more Conservatives sat on my side than sat with the current Leader of the Opposition. Most of the time, the right hon. Gentleman was joined in Committee by Tim Smith and Charles Hendry, who were Conservative Members of Parliament at that time.

The Leader of the Opposition controlled the situation and ensured, almost single-handedly, that the measure did not return to the Floor of the House until it was too late. The right hon. Gentleman was then promoted and, when the legislation returned to the House on Report, we had 32 minutes in which to deal with about 108 amendments. Alistair Burt, who then had charge of the legislation, ensured that it was blocked. The Bill sought to establish a Disability Rights Commission. We always said that the power to establish that commission could be removed from the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and inserted in the Disability Discrimination Act, but that did not happen.

I welcome the Opposition's new attitude and the contributions from the other side of the House that illustrate that considerable change of heart. However, we must deal with the Disability Discrimination Act because the measure before us is attached to it and shadows many of its terms and conditions. The commission will flower only when a Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill runs alongside it.

Let us explore some of the shortcomings of the Disability Discrimination Act. It has a restricted definition of a "disabled" person which classifies disability in purely clinical and medical rather than social terms. Definitions should always work against the discriminator: we should seek to stop discrimination rather than excluding people who do not fit into certain clinical categories. The commission will be able to tackle that definition problem as clause 2 allows it to present us with measures on which we can legislate further at a later stage. It is a dynamic for change, and the commission can play an important role when it comes to definitions.

The scope of the Disability Discrimination Act, limited by definition, was further restricted more specifically by the exclusion of certain areas. The commission must address that problem. The legislation as it first appeared before the House contained an incredible number of exceptions: almost every educational institution one could think of was excluded. The Bill was ultimately modified thanks to the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), but it had similar shortcomings in the transport area—for example, it was possible for disabled people to access railway and bus stations but not trains and buses.

The Disability Discrimination Bill was not intended to apply to Northern Ireland. However, Northern Ireland Members of Parliament signed up to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and four Northern Ireland Members from different political parties—including the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), who spoke earlier—sponsored the Bill. As a consequence, the present Leader of the Opposition promised, upon its introduction in the House, that the measure would apply to Northern Ireland. That was the first change made to the Bill.

The measure before us does not apply to Northern Ireland owing to particular circumstances in that Province at present. However, some of the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Belfast, South should be examined closely.

Another major defect of the Disability Discrimination Act, which is directly remedied in the Bill, is that it did not make provision for enforcement agencies. The National Disability Council was an advisory body mainly

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

stimulated into activity by Ministers. Luckily, this Government have put the council into action. As hon. Members have pointed out, the council did more than we imagined it would when it came out in favour of establishing a commission—the exact measure that we are debating today.

Clauses 2 to 9 contain the practical measures on how the commission will operate. They may need to be topped and tailed in Committee in view of the many points that have been made in the debate. Those measures tackle the difficulties of enforcing existing legislation, so the Bill enables us to enforce inadequate legislation, but we must look to the future and seek to introduce adequate legislation.

I have a great interest in Northern Ireland affairs, and it was appropriate that the improved Disability Discrimination Act was eventually enacted in the Province, where there has always been considerable commitment, across the political spectrum, to disability rights. The Bill will not apply to Northern Ireland because it will have an Equality Commission with a much wider scope. There is a problem in that there will be a delay in setting up that commission, but I know that the Assembly will not ignore disability rights.

The records reveal that the former Northern Ireland forum had an important debate on disability and supported fully the establishment of rights for disabled people across the board. There will always be pressure within the Northern Ireland system to deliver those rights in the Province. We need to apply our minds to find out the quickest way to achieve that delivery.

The Bill is widely welcomed by organisations of disabled people and their parliamentary allies. I like to view myself as one of those allies, which is why I am so enthusiastic about the Bill. Four hon. Members have attended the debate who took part in the Committee stage on my Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. It is strange not to have Lord Morris here for this debate. He, too, was a member of that Committee. People have recognised those hon. Members who have been active on this issue.

As I pointed out earlier, some Conservative Members also supported that Bill. However, other Conservatives Members opposed the adoption even of the Disability Discrimination Act, and thought that there should be no regulation. Some of them did not lose their seats at the last election. It is nice to see that they have been outweighed and outvoted within the Conservative ranks.

I turn to the point raised by the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), the Opposition spokesperson. We should not spoil the celebrations. There are objections to certain actions by organisations of disabled people, who are protesting about the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill. They are concerned that disabled people will experience losses as a result of that legislation.

The Disability Benefits Consortium, which comprises more than 250 groups, has already presented a mass lobby. To some extent, it has already pocketed the Bill. I think that it expected the Bill to be delivered at some stage, as things were moving in that direction. Statements were made at Labour party conferences and other forums which suggested that a Bill would be delivered. We are thankful that it is now before us. However, the consortium has moved on to other concerns and does not want to see itself being pushed back.

It would be a disaster if we lost the good will of the disability movement, especially when it is clear that this Bill—and the hoped-for Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—will not be the property of the Government or of Members and peers who are sympathetic to such measures. The Bill is the property of those in the disability movement who shaped it, campaigned for it and deserve it. When legislation passes through the House, including the Bill, certain people are only carrying the baton. Some of us have been proud to do it for short periods. So let us not have counter-productive measures running alongside the Bill.

The principles of this fine Bill should be fully established. On minor details, we might need to amend the Bill in Committee. Let the important principles that influence the Bill influence also our attitude to disability benefits.

5.6 pm

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): In the run-up to the 1997 general election, I was asked which of Labour's policies I was most looking forward to seeing implemented. I took a few minutes to think about my answer; the first matter to come to mind was capital for the replacement of Chapel-on-le-Frith infants school. However, that has been provided and it is in the bag. I am delighted to say that the new school will be open in September.

Secondly, as a councillor who had served at all levels of local government, I wanted to see an end to the garrotting of local government. However, I took it for granted that we would do that as well. Accordingly, I thought again.

Thirdly, as a parent, I wanted to see investment in health and a strong economy to see my family—my daughter—through the next generation. Was that to be my answer?

I thought of all these things and weighed them. Having done so, I said, "No, the real touchstone of a decent, civilised Government would be putting into place comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people." That was what being in government and our purpose in being in this place meant to me.

For several years before the election, I worked as a consultant to the Local Government Management Board, advising it on various matters. First, I advised it on how to make its services, information and local government premises accessible to people with sensory disabilities. Secondly, I trained its staff and others in deafness awareness in particular, and disability awareness in general. Thirdly, I was invited to address national conferences and seminars on the impact of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. I must take some responsibility for slightly misleading councils because I had the idea that if I led them to believe that they would have to do more than what was required by the Act, I would be performing a much better service to disabled people in the long run. If councils have inadvertently done more than they have to under the Act, I make no apology for that.

Over those years, I and others were fighting outside the House on these issues, as colleagues now present were doing in the House, along with Members of the other place. It was a wide and broad-based campaign. The history of the past few years has been dealt with fully. However, there were one or two milestones in my commitment to the cause which I want to relate to the House.

First, it was 12 or 13 years ago when I first had a one-and-a-half-hour conversation with a person whose first language was sign language. I learned so much during that conversation. I discovered a new world—a new culture—that I did not know existed. In years to come, I learned not only sign language, but to work in the world of deaf people, which brought me great enrichment, and great knowledge and experience that I have wanted to use ever since.

I particularly want to tell the House about a meeting in Manchester, at which 200 people came together as an American lawyer described the Americans with Disabilities Act and how it worked. That may appear to have been a normal occasion, but I was one of only six hearing people at the meeting. The American lawyer was profoundly deaf, as were almost all the people in the room.

The lawyer gave his presentation in American sign language. An interpreter interpreted from American sign language into British sign language, and another interpreter interpreted from British sign language into spoken English, for the benefit of the small minority of us who could not cope with the demands of the language of that particular culture.

That man—who was without hearing and without speech, and whose name I have unfortunately forgotten—was a highly successful advocate. He appeared in top courts and, every day of the week, represented hearing people before hearing judges and hearing juries. His deafness had been no barrier to his education, his profession or his success. Why, oh why, oh why—it has taken me two years to come up with that expression in the House—is not that same experience available for deaf people in this country? It would enable them to become top lawyers operating in the same environment as hearing and non-disabled people.

On another occasion, I spent probably not more than half an hour mastering the finger-spelling alphabet used by deaf-blind people. A code, representing the letters of the alphabet, is spelled out on someone's hand and I learned it because I had been invited to dinner with a friend of a friend—a deaf-blind woman who, 10 years previously, had added profound deafness to the total blindness with which she was born. She had communicated in that way to barely a dozen people over the previous 10 years.

That woman was strong, engaging, humorous, mentally agile and very able—even her dog was an expert on real ale—but, because she has neither hearing nor sight, some people would regard her as a freak. People such as her attract ignorance, disregard and disdain from the able-bodied majority in this country, who do not have the experience of disability to enable them to have the proper understanding that is required.

Those are profound examples, but there are many less profound—perhaps more trivial—examples as well. The hearing aid of a deaf person who turned up at the theatre only to find that the induction loop was not working—although there was no sign outside to tell him that—would be effectively useless. He would miss out on the benefit of the performance and would not try again—he would stop going to the theatre on the basis of one experience.

Someone who turned up to a council meeting, having said three weeks in advance that he required notes in Braille, only to be told on the day, "We have not got round to it yet. That facility is not available," would have his confidence taken away. "Why should I bother?" he would think to himself.

I met a young man called Thomas last year, when he came to the House to speak to a Royal National Institute for Deaf People event. He had committed himself to education and to bettering himself through achieving qualifications. Thomas went to catering college and excelled, qualifying as a junior chef. He worked as a chef in a café, but people called him names, rejected him and did not include him in what was going on. This qualified chef moved to a burger joint to sweep the toilets. He had spent years getting qualifications, but ended up sweeping toilets because that was his only way into the catering industry—in a capacity in which people would accept him.

All the examples I have given are real, but the situation is made worse, in some cases, when people try to help but get it wrong. I know of a council chamber in which, when the induction loop system was switched on, deaf people who used the T-switch on their hearing aids heard not only what was going on in the chamber, but what was going on in every committee room in the building. It was like Babel, and they had to turn their hearing aids off. The same council chamber featured not only fixed microphones for the induction loop system, which were very welcome, but low-energy light bulbs, because the council was committed to the environment. Unfortunately, the two systems were immediately next to each other on the ceiling, and when the induction loop system was switched on, all the hearing aids in the room would scream, making them completely unusable. The council decided not to change the light bulbs, because it was green to have them, so it had to abandon the induction loop system, on which it had spent thousands of pounds.

There are people who cannot obtain jobs for no other reason than that they have a facial disfigurement. Others are not considered for promotion because they have difficulty speaking, although they may be the best qualified for the job involved. Some employers refuse to provide "reasonable accommodation": they refuse to lower a desk, or to provide a powerful magnifying glass or a flashing fire alarm. Such simple, inexpensive changes are not made because of ignorance.

Ignorance of that kind was demonstrated a few months ago, when—as hon. Members probably read in the newspapers—a group of deaf people were evicted from a holiday camp because they were making too much noise. Deaf people experience that time after time. They are evicted from pubs because, apparently, people are frightened by the noises that they make, their gestures and the attitudes that they strike. But that simply is not true, as the managers of such places would know if they sat down and thought about it.

We can understand why, in such circumstances, disabled people want to give up. They have been banging their heads against a brick wall; it is so much easier to curl up in a corner, and just wish that all the examples of discrimination that so many disabled people take for granted—because they experience them every day—would go away. The 6 million people who have disabilities are tempted to put aside any ambition, and to reject any opportunity that might arise to seek a well-paid job or, in some cases, any job at all. The same applies to

[Mr. Tom Levitt]

the 8 million with hearing impairments, the 2 million with visual impairments and the hundreds of thousands with learning difficulties.

Last year, Leonard Cheshire produced a book entitled "Access Denied: Disabled People's Experience of Social Exclusion". In the light of the figures that I just gave, is it not astonishing that, according to an NOP poll conducted for the book, 53 per cent. of people—including 61 per cent. of those under 35—say that they have no regular contact with disabled people? They do not work with them, live with them or meet them on a daily basis. A quarter of the population say that they feel awkward in the presence of someone with a disability.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) will control her temper when I reveal that one person in three believes that someone in a wheelchair is likely to be less intelligent than other people. Four out of 10 say that it is accepted that it must be pretty difficult, or even impossible, for someone with a disability to obtain a job, and three quarters say that, if they became disabled, they would expect their living standards to fall. The good side is that 55 per cent. agree that society does not allow disabled people to be useful members of the community, and only one person in five thinks that disabled people are already adequately protected against discrimination.

Only this week, I read a report published by the Down's Syndrome Association entitled "You'll Never Join The Army". It provides the frightening revelation that one in four families with a Down's syndrome member has expressed great dissatisfaction about the attitude of medical staff. That publication contains some horrific stories. The report says that too many doctors regard people with Down's syndrome as sub-human and worthless. If one in four doctors give families that impression, what hope is there for the rest of us? How do we tackle that prejudice? How do we communicate the view that disabled people are people first and disabled second?

Hon. Members may be aware that the Government recently employed a young man with Down's syndrome for an advertising campaign with the theme, "See the person, not the disability". In the advertisement, the young boy is called on as a substitute in a school football match, much to the consternation of his team's supporters. He scores the winning goal and becomes their hero.

The Sun took that young boy to join Kevin Keegan and the England soccer team for a training session, and it devoted a double-page spread to the story. What I am about to tell the House will come as no surprise to those who know people with Down's syndrome. That story told of the happiness that the young man generated within himself and within others. It referred to the heights of his aspirations and his potential, and to the fact that there is no limit to what people like him can achieve.

It is just as well that this is a Second Reading debate, because I have come this far through my speech without mentioning the Disability Rights Commission, but I shall now put that right. The commission is the teeth that were missing from the 1995 legislation. It was born in the Labour party manifesto, and it was then handed over to the disability rights task force, which produced a unanimous report last summer about what it thought should be in the White Paper. The White Paper was published in July and accepted everything in the report, and that is reflected in the Bill. That is a classic example of consultation working.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell), who is not present at the moment. He said that the Bill is a good Bill, and that we should study it by all means, but that we should not clutter it with provisions that take away the freedom of the Disability Rights Commission to establish good practice, to decide for itself how it wants to change and to open itself up for review at a later date, so that we can see whether we are getting it right and make changes accordingly.

The commission is to be a wise, approachable, reliable, loyal and powerful friend. It is to be a friend to disabled people, and it is to be a friend to employers, providers of goods and services and even—dare I say it—to Departments and Government agencies. Let us ensure that our own house is in order, so that we do not have the embarrassment of Departments or Government agencies having their hands slapped by the Disability Rights Commission. Perish the thought, but we must ensure that that does not happen.

The commission is the centrepiece in a campaign to open hearts and minds to the possibilities that disabled people can offer to a free and open society. It is a symbol of the Government's commitment to end discrimination in employment, in access to information and in the provision of goods and services. It is the embodiment of our commitment to giving comprehensive and enforceable civil rights to a group of our fellow citizens who have been deprived of them for far too long, and who have suffered injustice as a result time after time. In my view, that is what we are here for.

5.24 pm

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): I strongly support the Bill and welcome its arrival from the other place. As hon. Members have noted, it has had widespread support from disabled people and their organisations, because they had such a strong say in shaping the Bill through the disability rights task force. The work of the task force has given great strength to the plans for the commission in the Bill.

I should like to pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the present Minister for the Arts and former Minister with responsibility for disabled people. He oversaw the setting up of the task force, chaired it in its early days and led the unanimous, inclusive and innovative way in which it did its work. I also pay tribute to his successor, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), who took up and continued that work.

I am proud to be a Member of Parliament on the Government Benches when the Government are introducing legislation to set up the Disability Rights Commission. It delivers the commitment in our manifesto as part of introducing enforceable and comprehensive civil rights for disabled people. The commission largely gives us enforceability. However, disabled people will still not have comprehensive rights, as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities mentioned.

It is difficult to overstate how important this development is for disabled people and disability organisations; it is historic. It is a landmark in civil rights legislation for the 8.5 million disabled people in Britain.

When I first became involved in disability campaigning, more than 15 years ago, we had barely conceived of a Disability Rights Commission and had hardly dared hope for one. At that time, I had the opportunity to work with MIND, the privilege to work for the all-party disablement group in its Ashley-Hannam heyday, and the great pleasure to work with my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), who pulled together and fought so hard for his Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

In the early days, the all-party group was of inestimable importance in giving a voice to disabled people and their concerns. It was crucial to encourage growing political awareness and skill among disabled people and their organisations. Leading members of that group are in the Chamber and have contributed to the debate. They include my hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), my hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts, the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who is not here, but who I know will wish that he were.

The work of the group over more than 25 years has laid part of the political ground for today's debate and, in particular, for the all-party consensus that now exists behind the Bill. I simply regret that the recognition that the commission is such an essential part of implementing disability legislation has eluded the Conservative party for so long.

There is no doubt that the lack of a commission has imposed a serious limit on redress for disabled people who suffer discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Act. There is no doubt that the lack of a commission has been a serious gap for those individuals, employers and service providers who have been looking for advice on how to implement legislation properly.

Equally, there is no doubt that the advent of the commission will enable disabled people to gain greater equality of opportunity, greater access and greater self-determination. It will enable employers and service providers to gain advice, information and practical support to help them to understand and to implement anti-discrimination legislation.

Having said that, the challenge remains immense. Discrimination against disabled people is long-standing, comprehensive and institutionalised. As my right hon. Friend the Minister reminded the House, our ultimate aims must be to remove discrimination, to challenge attitudes and to realise full civil rights for disabled people. The commission is not an end in itself, but a powerful means towards those greater ends.

I should like to deal with two issues that will be central to the success of the commission's work, although they are not addressed directly in the Bill. The first is funding.

Much has been made of comparisons between the budgets of the Disability Rights Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality. Disability organisations, in their various briefings and discussions with hon. Members, have stressed their concerns about the potential shortfall in the funding that has so far been budgeted; and I should expect no less. It is the duty and in the nature of interest lobbies to pocket what they are offered, and then to ask for more. The disability lobby is no different from any other lobby. It may be more effective, but it is no different.

Ultimately, it may prove that the budget for the Disability Rights Commission is not sufficient. I welcome my right hon. Friend the Minister's statement that the budget is not set in stone, and his commitment that he and his colleagues will review it in the light of operational experience. I should tell him that that ministerial promise will be closely watched by hon. Members and by the disability movement. Nevertheless, while perhaps gently cautioning Ministers, we should also congratulate them. I know—and, in private, the disability lobby will acknowledge—that the budget allocated to the commission has been hard fought for and hard won.

As I am laying down markers for the future, I should mention my second concern, which is the availability of technical support from the commission. The commission will have to ensure that such support and its other activities are available—not only regionally, but locally—to disabled people. For someone living in Wath, Rawmarsh or Dalton in my constituency, communication with or travel to a regional office based in Leeds or Newcastle, for example, can be just as difficult as dealing with a centre in London or Birmingham.

The Government have said that the commission will be able to call on the support and expertise of local voluntary bodies, but, in areas such as Rotherham, voluntary sector activity remains underdeveloped, and we simply do not have local groups with the necessary experience or expertise. Therefore, we need the commission—directly, and in partnership with local authorities, training and enterprise councils and voluntary sector umbrella bodies—to invest in building that capacity to make the commission's work effective and available locally. I believe that this can be done, but it will take time and a determination to do so.

In conclusion, I should like simply to underline the Bill's crucial importance, and the very widespread support that it has received. I should perhaps leave the final word to the all-party disablement group, which describes the Bill as

"a crucial element of the Government's strategy to ensure 'comprehensive and enforceable civil rights legislation at work and in society' for disabled people".

5.33 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): We have had a very constructive debate, which started with the Minister making his speech in a spirit of good will. Although there has been just a tad of sniper fire from Labour Back Benchers, hon. Members who have been in the Chamber for the entire debate, as many have been, will have no doubt that there is a will in the House to ensure not only that the Disability Rights Commission is established in legislation, but that it is effective.

An extremely important aspect of the debate, which has been dealt with by many hon. Members on both sides of the House, has been that the commission will have to work to meet the quite justified expectations of those who will depend on it, sometimes in circumstances that are critical in their lives.

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

People with disabilities will need support if they have, in whatever way, to challenge the establishment. If they are to rely on the commission, as they should be able to do, it is incumbent on hon. Members on both sides of the House to ensure that, as the Bill is passed, we examine its detail and get that as right as we can make it. We should ensure that we do that for people with disabilities, who are the ones who will have to use the Bill's provisions.

In opening the debate, the Minister said that the Government were about to start a three-year campaign of winning hearts and minds. I welcome that. However, Ministers will know that, very often, particularly when resources are scarce, it is difficult to know how to target a campaign that is rather broadly phrased. The Minister will be aware that sheer prejudice against people with disabilities—some of which is not based on ignorance—is the hardest thing to overcome. We must recognise that another generation will be coming along shortly on whom we must target our campaign, and we must make sure that the message is renewed.

I welcome the Minister's statement, but I hope that he will ensure that, however succesful he feels the three-year campaign has been, that will not be the end of it. I hope that there will be continuity and that whatever lessons are learned are used for future campaigns.

There are many reasons for discrimination; sometimes it is just pure ignorance. In many cases, it is quite deliberate. It is important to try to understand and second-guess what motivates that prejudice if it is ever to be tackled to benefit people with disabilities.

I do not know whether I shall be fortunate in being asked to serve on the Committee; I would like to do so. Many who have spoken from both sides of the House have raised issues about individual clauses of the Bill, which many of us would like to see examined in more detail. Therefore, it is not my intention to pre-empt the Committee's discussions. I take it from the body language of Ministers that they welcome that. I hope that they will listen not just to hon. Members, but to those important representatives of the various groups representing the disability organisations which have played a key part in this and previous Bills.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) was the first to pay tribute to the work of the many organisations with whom hon. Members have regular contact. I hope that there will be continuing dialogue involving Government Front Benchers while the Bill is in Committee. I will refer to some general points, in the hope that we can get down to the nitty-gritty in Committee.

It is important that the funding meets the reality of expectations. As has been said, if there is insufficient money for the commission—particularly in the early years—there will be a problem. Welcome as it is that the Government have made a commitment of £3 million for the first year and £11 million for the following two years, the latter figure will be a reduction unless it is linked to inflation or unless the reality of the costs in the first year are examined in some detail.

Will the Government propose a business plan for this commission in particular, rather than basing a plan on the work of other commissions? There may be lessons to be learned, but a proper business plan would be helpful, if only as a benchmark for years two and three in terms of the financial structure.

The Minister for the Arts, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth), has been mentioned several times in connection with the setting up of the task force, which has done a lot of preparation—which we commend. He and I had an exchange of correspondence at the beginning of the process, as I was particularly concerned that people with learning disabilities should be represented on the task force.

Ministers must look carefully at the definition of disability as it will be applied by the commission. It is my understanding that the definition in the 1995 Act will be used. That Act defines disability as

"a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities".

That is perfectly reasonable, but I seek some clarification.

The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) mentioned epilepsy and the Minister said that the definition would encompass it. That is welcome, but I wonder whether it is the Government's intention to produce a list of conditions, such as epilepsy, that are to be considered as disabilities under that definition. If so, what are the criteria under which organisations would have to make representations for conditions that are not on the list to be considered for inclusion?

I have a special interest in learning disabilities and developmental disorders. I know that it is a grey area. The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) mentioned Down's syndrome. That, along with cerebral palsy and autistic spectrum disorders, is a condition regarding which people in the medical profession might sometimes be at odds with one another as to whether it could medically be regarded as a learning disability. The benchmark that they tend to use is an IQ test; if the individual concerned has an IQ of more than 70, it is not necessarily defined as a learning disability.

We can all think of many people who could be medically diagnosed as having an autistic spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy or Down's syndrome who have very high IQs. Some have good university degrees. That does not mean that their ability to carry out normal day-to-day tasks, as per the 1995 definition, is not impaired. They have real needs that must be met.

People with such conditions who have good qualifications or are articulate in many ways might find real difficulties in applying for or holding down jobs. If the Minister is to produce a definitive list, we must not have people on the commission who do not understand the areas of disability that do not fit neatly into compartments. Such areas would be involved in some of the most difficult cases that I would certainly want to be referred to the commission.

How is the list to be drawn up and how can it be changed from time to time as different diagnoses and conditions are recognised? Will the individual doctor with care of the disabled person have to give consent? Many of the people to whom I have referred have a real battle with their own GPs or hospital consultants and are not properly diagnosed until a specialist with lifelong experience in dealing with their conditions becomes involved. Only then does someone in the medical profession understand the read-across of the diagnosis and the way in which it is likely to impact on someone's day-to-day life. I hope the Minister accepts that definition is important.

Equally important are the people who will work for the commission and deal with such cases. We discussed whether the chair or the vice-chair of the commission should be a person with a disability. I agree with what has been said on both sides of the House. I am sure that there will be no difficulty in finding people to fill those posts on merit. That should not preclude the possibility that both may be people with a disability. We still speak in terms of one or other having a disability, but if we are serious about equality, we should recognise that the two best candidates interviewed for the posts of chairman and vice-chairman may both be people with a disability. I hope that we will eliminate tokenism. Like other hon. Members, I know from experience that many of the principals who represent the charitable sector are extremely able people who, I am sure, will be lining up for the jobs. There will be no shortage of candidates.

On the day-to-day administration of the commission and the technical support required, can the Minister give me an assurance that there will be on-going training for people working for the commission across a range of disabilities? I know that the Minister received many representations about the task force. He struggled to persuade everyone who had an interest in the composition of the task force that every conceivable disability would be represented. I understand that that was an impossible task, but it did not stop me or others making representations to him.

Although a high percentage of its members will be people with disabilities, the task force will not necessarily be able to make a judgment on every case that comes before it. There must be a proper on-going training programme. Has the Minister considered who the commission will be able to call on, when necessary, for professional information about a particular disability? Some disabilities are quite rare. A constituent of mine is one of only 28 people in the country with a rare condition. However good the training, it would be impossible for the commission to make a clear judgment on such a case. Moreover, there are only a few people in the country who specialise in that condition. I hope that the Minister will consider such practical aspects of the commission's work.

There has been much discussion today about the difficulties of people who have been the subject of prejudice and discrimination. We heard first-hand accounts of such experience from the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) and others.

The hon. Member for Ilford, North (Ms Perham) was anxious that the commission should comprise people with disabilities and professionals. She warned against filling the commission with parents, for example. However, some of the strongest advocates of people with disabilities are parents. That does not mean that they know better than the person with the disability, but the discrimination is not always directed against the person with the disability. Service providers sometimes direct such discrimination against those who have responsibility, but the person with the disability suffers just the same.

Although I do not want the commission to be packed with advocates and parents, rather than people who have disabilities and can offer valuable first-hand experience, I hope that the experience of the advocate and the parent will be welcomed and used by the commission. Those people have considerable experience. Over the years they have stood up to the establishment—social services, doctors, hospitals, the Benefits Agency and so on. They have already gone a long way down the road of championing the rights of people with disabilities. I hope that we will not feel that they are tiresome, interfering busybodies, but that the commission can call upon their expertise and will welcome them in a measure proportionate to the contribution that they can make.

Ms Perham: I do not want to give the impression that the experience of parents is to be denigrated. More than half of the commission is to be made up of people with disabilities and I wanted to highlight their experience. With the best will in the world, the parents are not suffering from the disability, however great their experience of looking after the person with the disability. I meant no disrespect to parents and I pay tribute to them for the work that they do on behalf of their children.

Mrs. Browning: I do not want to get this out of proportion. I hope that the hon. Lady will recognise that sometimes it suits the establishment, if I may use the expression, to sideline the parent or advocate in order not to provide what the person with the disability needs. Unless the parent or advocate is prepared to stand their ground to get an issue sorted for the person with the disability, it does not happen. That is why I am making a case on their behalf. When they fight a battle on behalf of that person they suffer the pain, too, when the discrimination is obviously in front of them. I am sure that we can deal with that in more detail in Committee.

A further important part of the Bill concerns the conciliation of disputes and I welcome it. Many people have, rightly, welcomed the tone of the legislation, which seeks to facilitate disputes being sorted out on a conciliatory basis. That is important, not least because the individual who is discriminated against does not always want to go to the wire. It can add to their stress and subtract from their quality of life to be involved in litigation that may run on for months and sometimes even years. Litigation is not pleasant for anybody to go through and it is even less so for somebody who is trying to get fairness and equality in their life and who contends with pain and distress in other ways.

At the end of the day, it is right that the Bill gives the commission the statutory powers that it may have to use in the few cases—we hope it will be only a very few—where it needs the support of the legislation if the other measures do not work. That is welcome.

I wish to press the Minister on the provision to claw back the commission's expenses when a settlement is made, including an out-of-court settlement. As I understand it, the costs of the commission in championing the cause of an individual would be clawed back if there was a settlement. I know that the matter was mentioned in the other place during the Bill's passage. Bearing in mind the representations of the other place, what are the Minister's thoughts not just about the itemised account of genuine costs when costs have been awarded, but when costs come from a sum that has been clearly identified as compensation? The Minister shakes her head. I hope that I can interpret that to mean that there would be no attempt to recoup those costs. That is welcome. For those who may find themselves in a position where those costs must be met, what plans are there for the commission to produce in advance a tariff of reasonable charges? Will there be any guidance to the commission on what is chargeable on an hourly or a daily basis? That is necessary

[Mrs. Browning]

to ensure that there is no further dispute about the costs awarded or what the commission may claim as legitimate expenses in such cases. There could be many horrible disputes over that unless what the commission can charge is clearly defined. Other professionals such as solicitors can outline what charges may be expected in their work. It is important to deal with that up front rather than when cases start to appear, to avoid further challenges about how much of the money should be used and whether expenses are legitimate. It is important for the commission, in terms of auditing procedures, that a tariff of reasonable charges is considered and made known in advance.

We had some sniping from the Back Benches, which I take in good spirit. I want to share with the House a few words from *Hansard*:

"We are trying to give disabled people civil rights and opportunities consistent with those of other citizens and to establish a mechanism, through a commission, to deal with discrimination."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 1993; Vol. 219, c. 1160.]

That may not come immediately to hon. Members' minds because I said it the year after I was elected. The year after that, I was pleased to support the hon. Member for Kingswood in his private Member's Bill. It might be useful for new Members to know that when I voted for it, I was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of State for Employment. I fully expected to receive my notice to quit next morning. It did not come.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Unfortunately.

Mrs. Browning: Unfortunately, I was still in a job and went on to become a Minister. I hope that that story will give heart to new Members who think that always doing what the Whips want is the way to get on in the House. The Whips look furious with me. I hope that I have confounded that myth, because I was passionate about this issue when I came into the House. I hope that I have demonstrated that today. I wish the Bill godspeed and every success.

5.58 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge): This has been a thoughtful, high-quality and sometimes moving debate. The Government's proposals have been warmly welcomed outside the House by disabled people, businesses and the wider community. Of those who responded to our White Paper consultation, 94 per cent. supported our proposals on the role of the commission.

I am delighted that our proposals have received such strong support from hon. Members on both sides of the House. In opposition, we argued for such a commission to give force to civil rights legislation. In government, we can now legislate to fulfil our manifesto promise. In so doing, we shall not only be able to support disabled people in exercising their basic rights but help business to benefit from the contribution that disabled people can make as employers and customers. Several Government and Opposition Members raised significant issues. In the upper House, the Government listened carefully to some persuasive arguments. When persuaded, we adopted proposals to improve the Bill. That will be our approach as the Bill moves through this House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) painted a compelling picture of her personal experience and the day-to-day discrimination that she faces. I share her longing for the day when she can get into the toilet without having to negotiate a barbecue. My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) also welcomed the Bill and said that he felt like a Man United supporter; as an Arsenal fan, I cannot say that, but I am, as he is, euphoric about the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) paid tribute to the all-party disablement group, and I join him in those tributes. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) made a moving speech. I congratulate him on the work that he has done within the House and outside, especially on behalf of deaf people and those with hearing impairment.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) said, this is but the first step in developing comprehensive rights for disabled people. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Ms Perham) talked about her worry about recovery of costs. I assure her and the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) that there is no proposal to take costs from awards. It is where costs are awarded against someone else that that matters.

A number of hon. Members asked about the chair of the Disability Rights Commission. It is inconceivable that the first chair will not be a disabled person, but as hon. Members on both sides of the House have argued, it would be wrong to put that in the Bill. I hope that the members of the commission will represent a broad range of interests, but even if not, 150 people or so will work for the commission, and they will be able to work on behalf of disabled people.

Of course we want to work with business, as the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) said we should. We will work best in co-operation rather than by using compulsion to implement civil rights. It is for that reason that we have taken steps such as introducing written agreements to create an easier flow towards civil rights in employment or the supply of goods and services, and introducing non-discrimination notices. I hope that, during proceedings on the Bill, we can deal with many of the detailed issues that hon. Members have raised today.

I have to say to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) that we did not set the threshold for the small firms exemption. We inherited it. That was one of the problems. It was the legacy from which we had to start. We have grasped the opportunity to change the process for reviewing the threshold so that it can be reduced more swiftly. There is general acceptance among Labour Members that over time we want to see an end to discrimination against disabled people, whatever the size of the business in which they work.

The subject of funding has been raised by many hon. Members today, including the hon. Member for Maidenhead, my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), the hon. Member for

Winchester and my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth, who said that the disability lobby would of course always argue for more.

The estimates that we have presented are provisional estimates within the three-year settlement from the Treasury. We will review them as we proceed with the Bill, but they are a fair settlement and I think that we have got it about right.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale raised the issue of funding for information technology. As other hon. Members have said, we are the first Department to put papers such as those from the disability rights task force on the internet. That has excited a lot of discussion and debate on the proposals, and that is a way in which we wish to proceed in the future.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) raised some issues relating to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has its own Equality Commission, but that does not mean reduced rights for disabled people there compared with those in the rest of the United Kingdom. We intend that they should have the same rights. In response to concerns raised by disability organisations, we made significant amendments to the legislation. As a result of that, the Equality Commission may establish consultative councils to provide advice on aspects of equality.

Several hon. Members raised the flaws that we know exist in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, including the hon. Member for Winchester, my hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood, for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth) and for North-East Derbyshire. We are currently addressing many of those issues of principle in the disability rights task force, and we will report towards the end of the year, but rights of access to education and transport and whether the police should be subject to disability discrimination legislation are live issues on which we will return to the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South made a moving speech, in which she described the Disability Rights Commission as the engine to the vehicle that was established by the Disability Discrimination Act. I was pleased that she welcomed the new deal for disabled people, which I consider an extremely important component of our legislation.

This is a momentous day for disabled people. For far too many years, they have campaigned within their communities, through the media and in both Houses of Parliament for their own commission to defend and promote their civil rights. They have not been asking for a lot—simply for the opportunity to enjoy those basic rights that every able-bodied person takes for granted. Like other Labour Members, I feel shame that this House has not seen fit to support the many Bills that were debated in Parliament and which could have created a disability rights commission. We should never have delayed so long.

At the same time, I feel privileged and proud to be a member of the Government who have acted with both speed and thoroughness, and who are seizing this early opportunity in government to create the Disability Rights Commission. In our manifesto, we said that we would support comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people. By introducing the Bill, we are doing just that. We are creating a body whose prime duty will be to work towards the elimination of discrimination against disabled people. That body will be independent and well-resourced, and will have tough duties and strong powers. It will be able to take action on behalf of individuals who have been at the sharp end of experiencing discrimination. It will work with employers and suppliers of goods and services to help them develop policies and practices so that disabled people are treated fairly and justly.

However, it will be a body that can insist, through the judicial processes, that those employers and suppliers of goods and services who are resistant to change cease to discriminate against disabled people. It will promote good practice, disseminate effective guidance and information, and prepare statutory codes of practice. It will advise the Government on the workings of disability discrimination legislation and recommend changes. It will be powerful and will be a crucial element in the wide range of levers that we have developed to promote civil rights.

The Government are driven by the principle that economic prosperity and social inclusion are not competing aims, but are inextricably linked objectives. We can never sustain a successful competitive economy if we allow large sections of our community to be excluded by discrimination. Our proposals in the Bill are guided by that underpinning principle. We need the Disability Rights Commission to ensure that civil rights for disabled people are protected by powers of enforcement.

We are not arguing that a commission is enough in itself. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities said in his opening remarks, the proposed commission is not the whole journey. Here again, I am proud of how much we have achieved after less than two years in government. We are implementing the remaining provisions in part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, because we know that they will bring important advances in terms of disabled people's access to goods and services.

We have reduced the small employer threshold, which has given protection from employment discrimination to a further 70,000 disabled people. I am working hard with colleagues representing disability organisations and with other interested parties—from business, the trade unions, local government and the regions—on the task force to introduce proposals across the whole range of relevant activities to promote further civil rights.

However, unlike the previous Government, the Labour Government are not waiting for legislation before we act. Throughout Government, we are acting now to enhance the opportunities and rights of disabled people. As some of my hon. Friends have pointed out, we have introduced new building regulations for the construction of new dwellings; that will benefit 10 million people. We have successfully negotiated with transport operators so that from January this year all new trains will be accessible, from January next year all new single-decker buses will be accessible and from January 2002 all new double-decker buses will be accessible. Consultations on proposals for taxis are currently under way.

The Lord Chancellor's Department has initiated a pilot study and has appointed some visually impaired magistrates. In the Department for Education and Employment, we have been strongly promoting rights for disabled people in both education and employment.

[Ms Margaret Hodge]

We have thoroughly reviewed special educational needs and we are investing £60 million for children with SEN. That will bring greater equality of opportunity at school in an inclusive environment, where that is appropriate. We are hugely expanding further education and higher education, with an emphasis on widening participation, improving the accessibility of our education buildings and enhancing access and support. Our benefit reforms, the £195 million made available to a new deal for disabled people and the extra £30 million we have secured to expand the services which support disabled people in work are all vital steps in providing those disabled people who can work with the opportunity to do so.

The Government are taking comprehensive action in pursuit of comprehensive rights and we are achieving creditable and important progress, but we know that there is much left to do. If we are to embed justice and fairness, we need to challenge the many preconceptions, the ignorance and the sheer prejudice that still prevail. That cannot be achieved through legislation alone, nor can we achieve it through Government action alone. We need to work with others in business, in the disabled organisations, in the trade unions and in the community. We need to employ every lever available to transform attitudes and eliminate discrimination.

That is why we are working in partnership with others to launch an extensive campaign that aims to reach people's hearts and their minds. We hope that the Disability Rights Commission will take over that campaign. We want to confront prejudice, so that disabled people are recognised for their abilities—for what they can do and for the contribution that they can make; so that we understand that they have the same hopes and fears, loves and hates, ambitions and talents and qualities and faults as the rest of us; so that we see the person and his or her abilities and enable disabled people to play a full and equal part in our society.

Today's debate represents the fruit of many years of hard work by many people. I would like to pay particular tribute to Alf Morris and Jack Ashley, both of whom are now Members of the House of Lords, to my hon. Friends the Members for North-East Derbyshire and for Kingswood, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston and to my predecessor, now Minister for the Arts, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth). They have all campaigned tirelessly on behalf of disabled people. I also thank the members of the National Disability Council and the disability rights task force for their work and support in developing the Bill's proposals.

The Bill has wide support from disabled people and from business leaders. It is our job to ensure that, if it passes through the House, we bring its provisions promptly into effect. For my part, I want the Commission to open its doors for business in April 2000. When they were in government, the Conservatives argued that creating a Disability Rights Commission would provoke a backlash by providing "well meaning, but inappropriate advice". I am glad that they are now on the road to Damascus—I only hope that there will be accessible lavatories on that road.

How can the Opposition say that we do not need a commission to enforce civil rights? Tell that to the blind customer who went to a well-known hi-fi shop and wanted to pay for the goods by credit card; he was asked for confirmation of identity and the manager suggested that he produce a driving licence. How can they tell the man with mental health problems who prefers to explain the gap in his employment history by saying that he was in prison rather than admit to an episode of illness that we do not need a commission to enforce his rights? How can they tell the group of learning-disabled people who were thrown out of a pub because the landlord thought their presence would damage his trade that we do not need a commission to enforce their rights? We do, and the Labour Government will enact one.

The Bill is at the heart of our wider agenda to achieve an inclusive and fair society. Disabled people have waited a long time, and they should wait no longer. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

DISABILITY RIGHTS COMMISSION BILL *[LORDS] [MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Disability Rights Commission Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure of the Secretary of State attributable to the Act.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

AIR TRANSPORT COMPETITION RULES

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 8582/97, including two draft Council Regulations, one amending Regulation (EEC) No. 3975/87 laying down the procedure for the application of the rules on competition to undertakings in the air transport sector, and the other on the application of Article 85(3) of the Treaty to certain categories of agreement and concerted practices in the sector of air transport between the Community and third countries; and endorses the Government's approach not to support the Commission proposal.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CRIMINAL INJURIES COMPENSATION

That the Draft of Alterations to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, which was laid before this House on 25th March, be approved.

ROAD TRAFFIC

That the draft Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (Amendment) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 30th March, be approved.

COMPANIES

That the draft Local Authority (Stocks and Bonds) (Amendment) Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 30th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

SECTION 5 OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (AMENDMENT) ACT 1993

Ordered,

That, for the purposes of their approval under section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1999-2000 and the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report 1999-2000 shall be treated as if they were instruments subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Mr. Lawrence Horne

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

6.15 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I am grateful for this opportunity to raise in the House this evening the case of my constituent, Mr. Lawrence Horne, his experience of the Hague convention on child abduction, and the lessons that that constituency case presents for the application of the convention to this country and to other signatories to it.

The Minister will know that this sort of case inevitably involves family tragedy and much personal heartbreak. I know that, in responding to the debate, he will be aware both of that fact and of his duty to explain the Government's policy and the workings of the convention as a matter of public policy.

Mr. Lawrence Horne first came to see me about the abduction of his son some 18 months ago. Robert Horne is now three years old; his father is British and his mother is Portuguese. Robert is a British citizen born in Portugal: his certification as a British national was required when his birth was registered in that country. In May 1996, the family moved to England. Sadly, there were difficulties in the marriage, and Robert's parents separated in November 1996 when his mother took Robert from the family home to live with her. Divorce proceedings commenced in the English courts and, as is customary, the courts would have been involved in deciding about the care and control of Robert.

In the meantime, while divorce and care and control decisions were pending, the English courts granted my constituent Mr. Horne regular access to his son. The confidence that the courts demonstrated in Mr. Horne's wish to exercise fully his rights and responsibilities as a father can be seen in successive decisions by the county court to grant him increased regular access. Those decisions culminated in August 1997 in a ruling by Slough county court to grant Mr. Horne continuous access to Robert each week from Wednesday at 5 pm until Saturday at 5 pm.

However, in the same month, Slough county court allowed Mrs. Horne to take Robert for a holiday to her native country of Portugal. At the time, the court stipulated that the holiday should be no more than five weeks maximum in duration. Mrs. Horne did not return from that holiday, and she has held Robert in Portugal ever since, in defiance of repeated court orders made by Slough county court. The first of those orders was made in October 1997, and the matter was reviewed in March 1998, July 1998 and, most recently, March this year.

In October 1997, when Mrs. Horne failed to return within the time stipulated by the county court, Mr. Horne alerted the child abduction unit in the Lord Chancellor's Department, which then initiated proceedings under the Hague convention and alerted the central authorities in Portugal responsible for the enforcement of the convention to the nature of the case. In Portugal, Mrs. Horne commenced proceedings to secure custody of Robert under Portuguese law.

On 30 October 1997, the Portuguese courts gave interim guardianship to the mother, despite articles 16 and 17 of the Hague Convention explicitly providing that that

[Mr. David Lidington]

should not have been done, and that the initiation of proceedings under that international convention should rather have led to a stay in any proceedings commenced in Portugal. In his letter to me of 10 March 1998, the Minister expressed concern about that action by the Portuguese courts.

One of the main points of the Hague convention is that it exists to allow such distressing tug-of-love cases to be settled quickly so that there is the minimum possible disruption to the life and routine of vulnerable children at an early stage in their life. That objective of the Hague convention has certainly not been secured in this case. First, the Portuguese courts asked for a copy of a commentary on the convention by Professor Perez. They then asked for a translation of that commentary into Portuguese. When that was eventually done, they requested a social inquiry report into Robert's life style with his mother and her family.

In October 1998, a full year after the convention proceedings were initiated, the Portuguese family court finally came to a decision. Much to the horror and distress of my constituent and his family, the Lisbon court decided that Robert should not be returned to this country despite the UK court orders requiring his mother to make sure that he was returned and despite the clear intentions of the Hague convention.

In its judgment, the Lisbon court cited article 13(b) of the convention, declaring that to return Robert to England would be to put him in an intolerable position. The court declared that he was settled in Portugal, and referred, as one of the reasons for its judgment, to the fact that an interim custody order had been granted by the Portuguese courts to Mrs. Horne. On my reading of the convention, the citation in the judgment of the interim custody order seems to be a clear and flagrant breach of the clear duties imposed on Portugal by articles 16 and 17 of the convention. As the Minister's Department knows, my constituent has sought to appeal against that first decision by the Lisbon court.

I am afraid that my dealings with Mr. Horne and my experience of his case have led me to have serious doubts about the effectiveness of the convention. The House will know that those doubts are shared by others and have, for example, recently been expressed by Lady Meyer, the wife of Her Majesty's ambassador in Washington, and prompted considerable coverage in the national media.

The language of the convention is perfectly clear. Article 1 states:

"The objects of the present Convention are . . . to secure the prompt return of children wrongfully removed to or retained in any Contracting State; and . . . to ensure that rights of custody and of access under the law of one Contracting State are effectively respected in the other Contracting States."

That article has been breached in this case.

Article 2 states:

"Contracting States shall take all appropriate measures to secure within their territories the implementation of the objects of the Convention. For this purpose they shall use the most expeditious procedures available."

It appears to me, from my experience of the case, that article 2 has also been breached.

Article 3 states

"The removal or the retention of a child is to be considered wrongful where . . . it is in breach of rights of custody attributed to a person, an institution or any other body, either jointly or alone, under the law of the State in which the child was habitually resident immediately before the removal or retention."

There is no doubt that young Robert Horne was habitually resident in the United Kingdom immediately before his removal to Portugal. There is also no doubt that the English courts had determined that Mr. and Mrs. Horne were to share the rights of custody under the law, pending the resolution of their divorce proceedings and a final judicial decision in this country about what should happen to their son.

It has always seemed to me that the purpose of the convention is to avoid long-drawn-out and traumatic battles over children. However, it has failed my constituent in that respect. Surely the purpose of the convention also is to prevent any party from gaining an advantage in an application for care and custody by abducting a child to another country. Once again, it seems that the convention has manifestly failed my constituent.

I appreciate the constraints which the Minister is bound to observe in commenting in detail on judicial proceedings that are still under way. However, I hope that he will be able to offer some words of hope and comfort to my constituent to the effect that the Government will do whatever lies within their power to help Mr. Horne to secure the rights that he believes he is given under the convention to which both the United Kingdom and Portugal are signatories.

I hope also that the Minister will be able to refer specifically to the questions of parental access and legal aid, which are covered in the text of the convention. I deal first with access for Mr. Horne to Robert pending the final outcome of proceedings within Portugal. Article 7(f) of the convention provides that there shall be a duty upon the central authorities of the signatory countries not only to initiate or facilitate the institution of proceedings

"with a view to obtaining the return of the child"

but

"to make arrangements for organizing or securing the effective exercise of rights of access."

More is said about that principle in article 21, which states:

"The Central Authorities are bound by the obligations of co-operation which are set forth in Article 7 to promote the peaceful enjoyment of access rights and the fulfilment of any conditions to which the exercise of those rights may be subject."

The convention states:

"The Central Authorities shall take steps to remove, as far as possible, all obstacles to the exercise of such rights."

It adds:

"The Central Authorities, either directly or through intermediaries, may initiate or assist in the institution of proceedings with a view to organizing or protecting these rights and securing respect for the conditions to which the exercise of these rights may be subject."

Mr. Horne has more than once made application to the Portuguese central authorities for assistance to him in having access to his son. That access has never been granted and my constituent tells me that the Portuguese authorities have never acknowledged his repeated requests.

The articles of the convention impose clear duties on the central authorities of signatory countries. I hope that the Lord Chancellor's Department, as the relevant authority in the United Kingdom, will bring appropriate pressure to bear on the Portuguese central authorities so that Mr. Horne is able once again to have access to Robert, the son whom he loves a great deal and whom he has not seen since the autumn of 1997.

According to the text of the convention, legal aid involves duties on the part of the contracting states. In article 7(g), the convention requires that the central authorities should

"provide or facilitate the provision of legal aid and advice, including the participation of legal counsel and advisers."

Article 25 states:

"Nationals of the Contracting States and persons who are habitually resident within those States shall be entitled in matters concerned with the application of this Convention to legal aid and advice in any other Contracting State on the same conditions as if they themselves were nationals of and habitually resident in that State."

My constituent informs me that, once again, he has received neither acknowledgement nor action from the Portuguese authorities with regard to his repeated applications for legal aid, as provided for by the convention, within that country. I hope that the Minister can tell me what his Department can do to bring appropriate pressure to bear on the Portuguese central authorities.

It is ironic that, although my constituent has apparently been unable to obtain assistance in Portugal, his wife, who is holding Robert Horne in that country, is still in receipt of legal aid here, with which she has attempted in recent months to seek the striking out of the court orders requiring the boy's return to the United Kingdom.

It is not my constituent who abducted his son. The Minister will understand why Mr. Horne feels, to put it mildly, that he has been penalised for sticking to the law while his wife has been rewarded for acting in defiance of the convention. I have to ask, "Would my constituent have been better off had he tried to snatch Robert back from Portugal illegally and return him to his home jurisdiction?" On the basis of his experience, it appears to my constituent that those who seek to evade the duties imposed by the convention are able to get away with it.

That leads me to questions of the effectiveness of the convention as a whole. Is the Minister satisfied that Portugal is carrying out its obligations under the Hague convention or is this case an example of the state of affairs in which the British courts enforce international treaties to the letter, while other countries, which are happy to put their names to a piece of paper, in practice do precious little to carry out their obligations?

Behind the case lies a personal tragedy—a father denied access to a much-loved son, and a sister who cannot understand why her adored little brother has gone away from home and has not told her the reason. My constituent has not had the justice to which I believe he is entitled under the treaty to which this country and Portugal are signatories. I hope that the Minister will be able to give him some comfort.

6.33 pm

The Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) for raising the subject of international parental child abduction. He and I have corresponded on the case of his constituent, Mr. Lawrence Horne. I hear of similar cases from other hon. Members. I can well understand the anxiety and distress experienced by the left-behind parent, as well as the trauma suffered by the children who become the unwilling victims of their parents' mutual hostility.

Hon. Members who write to me about such cases ask me, as a Minister with responsibility for the judicial system in England and Wales, to intervene directly on behalf of their constituents. That I simply cannot do. I have to remind hon. Members of the fundamental principle that the judiciary must be, and must be seen to be, fully independent of Government. That principle applies just as much when a case is proceeding before a court abroad as it does to proceedings before our own domestic courts.

The hon. Gentleman has already told the House the facts of Mr. Horne's case, which is currently the subject of an appeal in the Portuguese courts. I must tell him that it would be inappropriate, and quite possibly counter-productive, for the Government at this stage to seek in any way to influence or constrain the judicial process in another jurisdiction.

That said, I should explain to the House how the Government tackle the problem of international child abduction, through international co-operation. The principal vehicle for that is the 1980 Hague convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction. The main provisions of the 1980 convention were brought into force in the United Kingdom in 1986, under the Child Abduction and Custody Act 1985. That domestic legislation allows cases in England and Wales to be heard only in the High Court, which means that the senior judiciary has developed a high level of experience and expertise in such work. It also enables cases to be heard with the minimum of delay.

The convention establishes a legal framework for the speedy return of children who have been abducted from one member state to another. Its history is one of the major success stories of international judicial co-operation. There are more than 44 member states, and others are continuously applying to the Hague conference to accede to the convention.

The convention is brought into force bilaterally between member states. For example, it has recently come into force between the United Kingdom and South Africa, between the UK and Turkmenistan and between the UK and Venezuela.

There are a number of ways in which cases brought under the convention can be resolved. Judicial decisions in a court case are only one means. A proportion of Hague convention applications that are made are subsequently withdrawn. In some, when we know the reason for the withdrawal of the application, the case has been resolved by agreement between the parents. In some cases, we know that the abducting parent has agreed to return the child voluntarily. In fact, some countries prefer to encourage voluntary returns rather than formal applications to the court. All that makes it impossible to produce complete and accurate statistics on the total number of cases dealt with under the convention, but what is beyond question is that the convention has had a very significant effect on the ease and speed with which abducted children are returned.

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

The convention requires member states to set up an effective mechanism for the handling of cases. In particular, each country must designate a central authority to deal with both incoming and outgoing applications for the return of children. In the United Kingdom, there is a separate central authority for each of the three legal jurisdictions: Northern Ireland, Scotland, and England and Wales. The Lord Chancellor is the central authority for England and Wales. His functions under the convention are carried out by the child abduction unit, which is a specialist unit within the Official Solicitor's office. Staff in the unit, which includes an in-house lawyer, send and receive applications for the return of children, communicate with parents, lawyers and other central authorities and instruct solicitors to act on behalf of applicants in other countries wanting to take proceedings in England and Wales. Their expertise is highly valued by all their contacts, both in this country and in other contracting states.

A parent whose child has been abducted to a convention country may, with the help of the relevant central authorities, make an application to the court in the distant country for the return of the child to his or her country of habitual residence. Convention cases are heard under a summary court procedure. The court must decide, under the terms of the convention, whether a child has been wrongfully removed from, or retained away from, the country of habitual residence, in breach of a right of custody. If so, the court must decide whether the child should be returned to the country of habitual residence.

The convention does not, and cannot, guarantee the return of the child in every case. The courts of each contracting state operate under their own internal procedures. It is for them to decide, applying the principles of the convention, whether or not a child should be returned in a particular case. When a return is ordered, it will be for the courts in the country of habitual residence to decide issues about the child's longer-term future. If a return is not ordered, it is open to the left-behind parent to apply under the convention for assistance in obtaining access to the child by means of domestic proceedings. In relevant countries, the Council of Europe custody and access convention can also be used.

I pay tribute to the work of the voluntary sector, which plays a significant role. We are fortunate in this country to have the Reunite National Council for Abducted Children, which offers impartial help and support to parents of abducted children, and makes an especially significant contribution to the prevention of abduction. It provides assistance by way of an advice line to parents whose children have been abducted, or who are in fear of abduction. For those parents and for other people with an interest, it provides advice by way of a child abduction prevention pack. It does extensive work with parents whose cases involve non-convention countries. By means of its contacts with lawyers in both convention and non-convention countries, it can help parents who need to take proceedings abroad to find a lawyer. It is frequently involved in international conferences on child abduction, which have recently included conferences organised by the South African Government as they proceed with the implementation of the convention. The Government recognise Reunite's work by making a contribution to its funding. The Reunite advice line is also helped by the BBC's "Children in Need" programme.

Despite that, however, Reunite is heavily dependent on the good will and commitment of its staff, volunteers and friends. It provides an excellent example of how a small voluntary agency can work effectively, not only in individual cases but by fostering understanding and co-operation throughout the national and international community.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about steps that the UK Government can take to secure the better operation of the convention between contracting states. The Government are generally satisfied with the legal principles underlying the convention. However, I recognise that the operation of international conventions involves the difficult alignment of different jurisdictions and different traditions of law and society. That inevitably involves problems. There is always scope for operational improvement through better co-ordination and co-operation among contracting states.

In addition to the action taken in individual cases by the central authority, the Government participate fully in mechanisms for reviewing the operation of the convention internationally. Discussions on specific problems take place regularly with other contracting states through judicial and administrative channels.

The hon. Gentleman has suggested in the past that the UK Government should disapply the 1980 Hague convention in relation to other contracting states that do not comply with its requirements. The Government do not consider that there would be any advantage to this country or to its citizens in disapplying the operation of the convention. Our experience has shown that, when problems arise, because of the mechanisms between contracting states under the Hague convention, there is a much higher success rate in securing returns from those countries than in cases in which a child has been abducted to a non-convention country.

The hon. Gentleman also raised with me two specific points: parental access under the Hague convention and legal aid. Parental access is dealt with under article 21 of the convention. As the hon. Gentleman set out clearly the way in which that article operates, I shall not repeat his efforts. Parental access is an issue in domestic proceedings within the competent jurisdiction. The application of the convention is governed by those internal domestic proceedings.

The availability of legal aid to applicants under the convention in other jurisdictions is a matter for those jurisdictions. There is no uniform application, as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's concern and interest. The Government will continue to seek practical improvements in the way in which the law in this area operates. I am particularly grateful that the hon. Gentleman has not only raised the important individual case of his constituent, but has taken a clear interest in the general question of how this mechanism can be improved for the benefit of everyone.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 23 April 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speakers' Statement

9.34 am

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) raised a point of order yesterday to which I promised to reply. In my rulings on the case of Senator Pinochet, I have always indicated that the sub judice rule applies in relation to the extradition case to be decided by the courts. On a number of occasions, I have allowed questions to be put in the House on the impact of the case on relations with Chile and on the Home Secretary's role in giving an authority to proceed in extradition cases generally. When such matters have been raised, the Chair has sought to restrict comment on the issues to be determined in the extradition case. In that respect, the exchanges in the House of Lords on Wednesday were not out of line with what has been possible in this House. The Table Office will continue to assist Members in pursuing such matters in questions and by other means.

Orders of the Day

Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.35 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

One way in which to judge the society that we live in is to assess the way in which we treat our children. One has only to consider the awful images of Kosovo to know that children can bring out strong emotions. Our country has a proud record of protecting the rights of children. It is interesting that the issue is covered by other private Members' Bills, including the one that came first in the ballot, the Protection of Children Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley).

For children who need care, we have a very good fostering and adoption system. Adoption of children living in the United Kingdom is rightly well regulated. The transfer of a child from his or her natural birth parents to a new set of parents cannot take place without rigorous controls and processes. Most adoptions in the UK involve British babies and parents. However, there is another sort of adoption, involving couples who seek to adopt a child from a foreign country. Although that does not involve large numbers, on average, five or six such adoptions take place every week. Intercountry adoption, as it is known, is new to this country and there are few rules to regulate it. My Bill seeks not only to provide for the regulation of intercountry adoption, but to improve the quality of intercountry adoption services to give even better protection to the children and, importantly, to help the prospective parents through the routes that will lead to adoption.

Until the Romanian revolution in 1989, intercountry adoption had a low profile in Britain. Although it has risen to about 300 cases a year, we do much less than other countries. In the United States, the annual figure for overseas adoptions is 10,000; in Holland and Sweden, about 2,000. Children come to this country from all over the world. In the past six years, families in the United Kingdom have adopted children from 42 different countries. The most popular are China, India and Guatemala. It is interesting to note that only three children came from Yugoslavia or Serbia, which do not have a history of allowing children to be adopted abroad.

If such small numbers are involved, why do we need the Bill? There are some problems with the current system. Most intercountry adoptions go through the proper channels. Prospective adopters get approval from local authority social services departments or an approved agency. Although the process is long and costly, it is legal and operates in the interests of the child. Regrettably, it is estimated that, in about 100 cases a year, people try to avoid the adoption procedures and bring children into the UK without their suitability as adoptive parents being properly assessed. In such cases, prospective parents may be aware that, if they went through the assessment programme, they would not be successful or, worse, they may have gone through it and been considered unsuitable, but believe that taking a foreign child is a back way to adoption.

[Mr. Mark Oaten]

Not only do some foreign adoption authorities and individuals place children with such people, but the means by which some children become available is a cause for concern. It is not uncommon for children to be delivered to an airport in mainland Europe for the adoptive parents to collect them. They return by car to the UK by a selected port of entry late at night, when they know that they are unlikely to be challenged about the presence of an unexpected child. Sadly, the new parents often meet the child for the first time at the airport, which must be traumatic for the children. The Bill addresses those and other concerns.

Over the past few months, I have met many of the groups involved in intercountry adoption to learn more about their concerns: the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, the overseas adoption helpline, the Adoption Forum, Childlink and many others. I put on record their help and advice to me in preparing the Bill and their invaluable work in raising awareness of intercountry adoption.

More importantly, I have been speaking to couples who have gone through the process—and who, in some cases, have brought children into the country without permission. Some of their concerns are great, and I hope that they will be tackled by the Bill. I shall return to that subject later.

So what does the Bill do? There are four key areas. First, the Bill will introduce for the first time specific provisions to regulate intercountry adoption. It will make it clear to local authorities that they have a responsibility to provide an adoption service that includes intercountry adoption.

Secondly, one of the Bill's main aims is to enable the UK to ratify the 1993 Hague convention on protection of children and co-operation in respect of intercountry adoption, in whose preparation, I am pleased to say, the UK has played an influential part. Thirdly, other provisions of the Bill will regulate adoption to prevent trafficking in children and to enable a child adopted from overseas to enjoy the same legal status as does a child adopted in the UK.

Finally, other aspects of the Bill will improve the adoption process, avoiding unnecessary delays in handling adoption applications and speeding up the process in the interests of all concerned.

I stress that the Bill is not intended to place new obstacles in the path of people who wish to adopt children from overseas. However, it will establish a clear legal framework to enable prospective adopters to adopt from abroad in a way that provides maximum protection for the child.

I shall now deal with those four areas in more detail. The UK's ratification of the 1993 Hague convention is long overdue. The convention is underpinned by the 1989 United Nations convention on the rights of the child. The countries that have ratified that convention agree to have key standards and that gives an assurance that, when adoptions proceed between those countries, everything is in the greatest possible order.

Amazingly, although we signed the convention about six years ago, we are not yet among the countries that have ratified it. Despite cross-party support there has not, to date, been parliamentary time to do so, and I hope that, today, we can start to put that right, because it must seem very odd to countries such as the Philippines, Poland and Romania, for example, which have ratified the convention and are sending their children to the UK, that the United Kingdom has not yet ratified it.

The second important measure is to tackle the bad practice—if that is the right word—of private arrangements for adoption and bringing a child into the UK for adoption without the proper authority. It is important to state that no person has a right to adopt. The Adoption Act 1976 provides that an adoption may be arranged only by a local authority or an approved adoption agency—unless the child is a blood relative of the person making the arrangements. It is an important principle that the local authority or agency must make proper assessments, proper home visits and proper approvals before that adoption can proceed. However, a person making arrangements who is not a local authority or an approved agency is not authorised to do so and is committing a criminal offence.

The Department of Health has long maintained the view that privately commissioned home study assessments, as they are known, that are made in the knowledge that they are to lead towards an intercountry adoption contravene the 1976 Act. However, some recent High Court judgments have not always reflected the Department's view. The Bill will, therefore, make it clear that privately commissioned assessments with the aim of an adoption will not be permitted, and that any person who prepares such a report or starts to make arrangements for an intercountry adoption in that way will be guilty of a criminal offence. The future of a child should not be the outcome of some private negotiations between lawyers or people who are not professionally qualified. In addition, it is planned, by regulations to follow, to tighten the laws in relation to bringing children into the country without proper procedures.

The third measure is somewhat technical, but it will mean that children adopted under the 1993 convention will receive British citizenship automatically if at least one parent is British when the adoption order is made, and is resident in the UK. That is a simple technique, which will replace the current long-drawn-out process, involving several appearances in court. It also meets the requirements of the Hague convention that a child adopted from overseas will enjoy a status at least equal to that of a child adopted in the UK.

Fourthly and finally, one of the Bill's most important aspects is its creation of a more efficient and effective process for the operation of intercountry adoption services. My discussions with parents revealed that many were dissatisfied with the service that they received from local authorities. I suppose that, as so few foreign adoptions take place, it is not surprising that good practice is, or has been, very rare. It has led to a wide variation in local authorities' performance in that area, and I strongly believe that firm guidelines and standards need to be put in place, with better training—but, above all, with a more positive attitude to intercountry adoption.

Perhaps that comment is slightly unfair on some local authorities, whose standards and practice in intercountry adoption are very high; but so many parents told me that they were intensely frustrated by the process they experienced that I must conclude that some social workers had a negative attitude to intercountry adoption. Parents felt

that they were being asked unrealistic questions; they told me that, in some cases, a definite attempt was made to talk them out of the process when they first made contact with the social services department.

Inevitably, there will be some friction in the process. Prospective parents are often absolutely determined to adopt, and they are obviously very impatient. Social services rightly put the child's interests first. There is friction between two conflicting interests. However, the system needs to be much more accommodating, to help prospective adopters to provide a new home and family for some of the world's most disadvantaged children.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): The hon. Gentleman is obviously very learned on the subject, and has investigated it and taken evidence. Has he come across evidence of institutionalised prejudice in intercountry adoptions? Are there any other areas where he considers that there might be similar prejudice? I am aware of cases in Norfolk where the size of a person's body has been taken into account in deciding whether they are suitable to be an adopter.

Mr. Oaten: The hon. Gentleman's intervention could draw me into the very different path of discussing the adoption process for UK children. I know that concern about the criteria for adoption is widespread. We do hear of strange-sounding rulings, with people being turned down as adopters on the ground of their size or the fact that they smoke. However, you would rule me out of order if I took that path, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because that is an issue for a separate debate. Parents express to me their concern that the people who are interviewing them feel that it is weird and strange that a couple should want to adopt a child from a foreign country—and that is wrong. I hope that some of the measures in the Bill will change that culture and introduce training to try to iron out those problems.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take these remarks in the spirit in which they are meant because I support the Bill. Does he acknowledge that there are good reasons for regarding intercountry adoption as a measure of last resort, and that there is a need to take into account the fundamental principles in the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, concerning the child's right to be cared for by parents and to preserve his or her identity, as well as cultural, ethnic and language factors?

Mr. Oaten: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I am convinced that, if a couple who have applied initially to adopt a UK baby are turned down, there is no reason why they should regard the adoption of a child from a foreign country as an easier option. If it is wrong that they should adopt a child from this country, it is wrong that they should adopt a child from any country. Children from foreign countries are not second-class citizens, and they should be entitled to the rights and protection to which children from this country are entitled. However, I argue that, as there have been few intercountry adoptions in the UK, a form of prejudice—not protection—exists, which is based on ignorance and misunderstanding of the reasons why couples may want to adopt a child from a foreign country.

Jackie Ballard (Taunton): I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend's flow. I strongly agree that there is a need for consistent good practice across local authorities in dealing with intercountry adoption. Good practice would dictate that the social worker carrying out the investigation should visit the child in the country of origin, as that is the only way to get a complete picture. That has clear resource implications for local authorities. Has my hon. Friend considered how those might be dealt with in future?

Mr. Oaten: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The concerns of a social worker seeking reassurance that the prospective child is suitable for adoption can, to some extent, be put aside because one of the benefits of the convention is that countries that have signed it have gone through rigorous tests. For a prospective child from, for example, Romania, which is a signatory, such an inspection will have been carried out. We can be much more confident that, in the adoption of a child from Romania, rigorous tests have been carried out and that the natural parents are aware, and approve, of the adoption. That reduces the need for visits by UK social workers.

I shall highlight some of the concerns expressed by parents. On many issues, there seems to be a fundamental breakdown of communications. Charges for intercountry adoption services are certainly a cause of friction. I was surprised to discover that, although the adoption of children from this country costs nothing, if a couple want to adopt a child from a foreign country, a charge is made by social services departments for the application to go through the approval procedure.

Charges for intercountry adoption services vary from £1,500 in Essex to £3,200 in Northamptonshire. Parents rightly feel that the costs are high, especially as the route that has led them to the adoption process may have been a couple of years of expensive infertility treatment. What annoys parents even more than the costs is the wide variation throughout the country, and the lack of explanation of what the charges are for. The Bill cannot solve that problem, but I know that the Minister is sympathetic to the view that the charges need to be examined.

There is confusion about the process whereby a social services department decides whether to approve an adoption, and particularly about the production of a home study report. Parents often do not understand why they are asked so many questions, many of which are extremely personal. It must be better explained to parents why such questions need to be asked. Couples are also confused about whether they can object to aspects of the home study report or appeal against a decision.

Delays in the intercountry adoption process were one of the causes of greatest concern. Time and again, parents said to me, "This has dragged out for so long. We know the child, we have met the child, and we are desperate to make that child part of our family." They see the child growing up and they must wait, often for two years, before they can have that child. They feel that the process is bureaucratic and weighed down with layers of paperwork. I am confident that signing the international convention will reduce that bureaucracy.

The Bill cannot deal with every problem, but it aims to ensure that the same standards are applied to those seeking to adopt from overseas as are applied to the adoption of children within the UK. That is an important principle. To do otherwise would leave the UK open to

[Mr. Oaten]

the justifiable accusation of applying double standards. The provisions will enable improvements to be made to the present procedures, including the reduction of unnecessary delays.

The Bill will bring intercountry adoption within the mainstream adoption services. That will tackle some of the problems that I highlighted, by leading to increased awareness, more relevant training and higher standards. I am pleased to say that my authority, Hampshire county council, has become an expert in the field. The message must go out to other authorities that, if some can do it well, others need to improve their practice.

There are many aspects and details of the Bill that I have not covered. I hope that, if the Bill proceeds to the next stage, those can be discussed in Committee.

Above all, I want the Bill to bring a new standard and atmosphere to adoption from overseas. The message should be that it is a wonderful experience for child and new parents, alike—one that should be encouraged and developed. Controls must be put in place to ensure that the children come first, but that must be done in a professional way, taking account of the prospective parents' needs and feelings. I want all adoption agencies to take a more positive approach to intercountry adoption, to recommend people as suitable to adopt because of their qualities as adoptive parents, and not to dwell so much on their weaknesses. The perfect family does not exist.

In such a climate, we might be able to reduce, if not eliminate, cases in which people choose to bypass the system. For those who still ignore the law, the Bill sends a clear message. Bringing children into this country in the back of a car late at night through Margate will result in prosecution. Children from any country have the right to protection.

This is a tidy, well-prepared Bill. I put on record my gratitude to the Government, the Minister and his officials, who have provided every assistance needed since I decided to take on the Bill, which had Government support some time ago. I know that senior officials in the Department of Health working in the field of adoption have been disappointed by the delay in ratifying the Hague treaty. Today, we can put that right. Families wanting to adopt are sometimes frustrated by the system. Today, we can start to put that right. Finally, children adopted from other countries should have the same rights and protection as British adopted children. Today, we can start to put that right. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.56 am

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on introducing the Bill. If all goes well, he may join the select band of hon. Members who, when they retire in 50 or 100 years, can say that they have been personally responsible for passing a Bill, something that not all of us will be able to claim. I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman has chosen for his Bill a subject of enormous emotional importance to the families concerned. It is not just a technical adjustment; it will make a real difference to people's lives.

I support the Bill, but I shall raise a couple of issues that were touched on by the hon. Gentleman in his introductory remarks, and others that have not so far been addressed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) mentioned, intercountry adoption is a somewhat controversial subject outside the House to an extent that is not always apparent in our discussions. Between the parties there is broad agreement that we need to implement the Hague convention and regulate adoption in a sensible way.

As we have heard, prospective adoptive parents have found the system slow and bureaucratic or simply unfair. The conditions for being an adoptive parent seem to be so vastly in excess of what is expected of natural parents that they cannot help feeling that they are being unreasonably obstructed. That applies particularly in the case of intercountry adoption. The hon. Member for Winchester rightly stressed that a child in a foreign country is not a second-class citizen. The same standards should apply.

However, people see children in Romania, to take a well-known example, living in appalling conditions. When a local authority social services official quizzes them closely about their smoking habits, income or other aspects that they might consider secondary, they feel that the system is putting bureaucratic obstruction in the way of a vast improvement in the standard of living of such a child.

We recognise the need for serious purpose and the need to avoid an automatic assumption that, merely by moving to a country where the income of the family will be higher, the child will be better off. There are examples in other countries where such thinking has gone badly wrong. In Switzerland, a systematic effort was made after the war to persuade gypsy families to allow their children to be adopted, because it was thought to be more satisfactory for a child to have a stable background rather than a travelling background. It is now generally accepted in Switzerland that that policy was disastrously mistaken and that a lot of human misery resulted.

I have a small reservation. It is widely thought that the British system for checking the suitability of adoptive parents is full of unreasonable obstacles, so there will be some unease about extending it to intercountry adoption. There is a danger that a system that, to some extent, is perceived as over-bureaucratic will be extended to cover all possible adoptions. That is not a reason not to act, because we need a regulated framework, but it is a reason for welcoming the stress laid by the hon. Member for Winchester on the need for as sensible and flexible a process as possible for home adoption as well as for intercountry adoption.

We think of a normal adoption case as involving a couple who want to have a child of their own, but are unable to do so. They go to an agency and say, "We want to have a child. Please find one for us," perhaps according to one or two criteria. The other extreme, which is also referred to in the Bill, is a case within a particular family in which it is thought appropriate for another couple within that family to take over the care of the child.

I draw attention, however, to what might be described as the "middle case", which is perhaps in danger of falling between two stools. There may, for example, be a close relationship, such as long-standing friendship, but no family tie, between the couple who want to adopt and the child. The classic case involves the parents being killed, perhaps in a car accident; no other family member being

suited to look after the child; close friends of the late parents offering to adopt the child; and that offer being greatly welcomed by the family.

As far as I can see, article 29 of the convention could make such an adoption illegal. It states:

"There shall be no contact between the prospective adoptive parents and the child's parents or any other person who has care of the child until the requirements of Article 4, sub-paragraphs a to c, and Article 5, sub-paragraph a, have been met, unless the adoption takes place within a family or unless the contact is in compliance with the conditions established by the component authority of the State of origin."

The words

"conditions established by the competent authority"

could provide a way of meeting that objection, but that is dependent on what those conditions might be. Although we obviously cannot control what conditions may be set down by other countries, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to allow for the possibility of previous contact—in good faith and due to long-standing friendship between the potential adoptive parents and the family of the child involved—when we consider our own regulations for such situations.

Another issue is not addressed by the Bill, and cannot easily be encompassed by it. The other country involved may be either not a signatory to the convention or in a state of chaos, perhaps because of civil war, which makes it unable to fulfil the conditions laid down by the convention. In respect of the first example, I presume that the current arrangements for intercountry adoption will continue to apply. Unfortunately, that means that there will still be a loophole. It will be possible, following the current procedure, to attempt to adopt a child from, say, Papua New Guinea if it has not yet signed the convention. I understand that the convention applies only to cases in which the child is a citizen of a signatory country.

Mr. Oaten: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there is concern that not all countries are covered by the convention, but the Department of Health and others are doing a great deal of work to persuade as many countries as possible to be part of it. I hope that many cases and countries will be covered by the convention, but the law cannot be bypassed and it will certainly protect children, even those coming from non-convention countries. It will still be illegal to traffick, so there will be no way in which countries can avoid those procedures by not being convention countries.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that clarification, although it is not clear to me exactly how a couple should proceed if, for reasons of friendship, they want to adopt a child from a country that is not yet a signatory. Perhaps that will be addressed in later discussions.

If the other country is a signatory, but is unable to fulfil the terms of the convention due to maladministration or current disturbances within it, there may be an additional problem. I wonder whether we could—perhaps under article 29—allow for some exemption in such circumstances. The hon. Member for Winchester referred to the current situation in Yugoslavia. I understand that, if a couple in Britain were willing to adopt an orphan from Kosovo, but Yugoslavia, which is currently the legal authority responsible for Kosovo, was unwilling to support that process despite being a signatory to the convention, no progress could be made. Perhaps he will consider that aspect and refer to it in his response.

Despite those relatively technical reservations, I very much welcome the direction of the Bill. I commend it to the House and congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester on introducing it.

10.8 am

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on securing a place in the ballot and on his choice of a Bill that will make an important contribution to improving children's welfare. I also welcome the support of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health, who has responsibilities in this area. He is strongly committed to improving the quality of adoption services in this country.

I should declare an interest. Before I was elected to Parliament, I worked for a local authority in a team specialising in adoption and fostering, and I accept that that may have influenced my views. Adoption is an emotive issue, and about one in 10 people in this country have been affected either directly or indirectly by the experience. Public views are often defined by personal experience.

The Bill is welcome because it will provide, for the first time, a proper legal framework for intercountry adoption. As the hon. Member for Winchester said, the present arrangements are open to abuse, do not encourage high standards in adoption and are frustrating to prospective adopters.

Intercountry adoption is increasing. In 1993, there were 101 such adoptions; in 1998, there were 258, and 38 took place in the north of England. Every year, approximately 2,000 adoption orders are made in this country, so intercountry adoption is not such an insignificant part. The quality of those adoptions and the welfare of the children involved deserve serious attention.

The growth in intercountry adoption is understandable, because couples who wish to adopt find that the number of children available for adoption in the UK is declining. They may face long waits, especially for babies, or find that the children who are available are older than they would wish or have complex backgrounds, present difficult emotional problems or have serious handicaps. The adoption of a child from another country appears to offer that child an opportunity for a permanent family and, at the same time, provide the much desired family for the couple or person seeking adoption. The 1993 Hague convention on protection of children and co-operation in respect of intercountry adoption recognises that intercountry adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her state of origin. Such children may face a childhood in institutional care and a lifetime in poverty. However, intercountry adoption is a controversial area, because it essentially involves the adoption of children from poor countries by people from the relatively affluent west.

I found on the internet last night 100 sites set up by agencies in what is called the US market offering to facilitate intercountry adoption of children from all over the world. One agency offered 750 children. The prospect of such large-scale intercountry adoption developing in this country is alarming. The hon. Member for Winchester

[Ms Ann Coffey]

mentioned that people were concerned about paying the fee for a home study report, but the prices charged by agencies abroad vary from $10,000 to $22,000, depending on the child available. The younger the child, the more expensive the agency fee. It is indeed a market, and it is privately financed. If people are worried about the cost of home study reports, they are unlikely to be able to afford the agency fees in the countries where the children reside. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the cost in this country should be uniform; we should ensure that the cost is not higher for someone living in Manchester than it is for someone living in Norfolk.

As I have said, the issue is controversial. The British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering say in one of their leaflets that, although adoption may be the answer for one individual, it will never be the solution for meeting the needs of millions of children in families in situations of extreme deprivation. It expresses the concern that, if large-scale intercountry adoption programmes were introduced, they could prevent or delay the development of proper local child care programmes. It expresses a special concern about intercountry adoption as a response to war and conflict which may result in huge numbers of displaced children for whom it may be difficult to establish whether they have any living relatives.

Dr. Palmer: As I understand it, the provisions of the Bill would meet that objection in that they would permit an intercountry adoption only if a thorough investigation had taken place into the child's circumstances.

Ms Coffey: As I understand it, if the country in which the child is residing has ratified the Hague convention, everyone can be sure that a proper investigation has been carried out to ensure that the child is available for adoption. The concern is that, in countries that have not ratified it, one cannot be sure that the proper investigations have taken place. We may have got our procedures right, but the countries offering children may not, especially in times of conflict when children may become separated from parents who cannot be found.

Others have concerns about children being removed from their country of origin and contact with their culture. They question whether a solution that appears in the short term to offer so much to parents and child will, in the long term, cause difficulties as those children grow through adolescence into adulthood. We should not underestimate the difficulties of intercountry adoption, and of adoption in general. It is not an easy option and can raise issues of identity for the child in later life.

Adoption practice in this country has changed and parents are encouraged to help their adoptive children to understand their identity by being open with them about their adoptive status from an early age. Meetings can be arranged between the mother offering the child for adoption and the adoptive parents. Adoptive parents can be encouraged to keep mementoes of the child's background, including pictures of their birth families, and—in some cases—to keep contact with relatives. Gone are the days when children discovered their adoptive status later in life and when the idea of adoption was to act as if, for all intents and purposes, the adoptive parents were the birth parents and the child's past identity was wiped out as if it did not exist. For all of us, the question of who we are is answered in part by where we came from and the family stories that give us a sense of continuity with the past and our place in the future. That is important to ensure the success of adoption, and can be difficult in intercountry adoption, but not impossible.

I do not believe that the issues that I have outlined can be resolved by an ideological approach. For a child without a caring family to grow up in, having a happy, loving family in this country and being offered opportunities and a real chance in life are much the best outcome, especially if the existing culture can offer only poverty and early death. On the other hand, for a child to be placed in a family who offer inadequate or abusive parenting and to end up in care in one of our institutions, facing a poor future, does not seem such a good outcome; that child might have been better left in an orphanage.

I am pleased to support the Bill, not because it is designed to encourage large-scale intercountry adoptions, but because it will improve the quality of such adoptions to ensure their success. It would amend existing adoption legislation to make it clear that the adoption service provided by local authorities includes all adoptions, not just those made in Great Britain. It would mean that voluntary agencies wishing to be approved for intercountry adoptions must be approved for all adoptions and that standards of assessment for people wishing to be approved will be the same, regardless of the country of origin of the child. That has not always been the case and local authorities have sometimes viewed the preparation of a report on a couple applying to adopt in another country as having a lower priority and have given less attention to it, so that couples seeking such a report often become frustrated. That is because intercountry adoption has been seen as outside mainstream work. The Bill would put it back into the mainstream, and that can only be of benefit to children and increase the chances of successful adoption.

The quality of the adoptions is key and we must continue to drive up standards generally, and learn from adoption casualties. Those casualties exist because adoption is not always a case of a family walking off into the sunset and living happily ever after. Some of the stories of adopted children make it clear that that is far from the case. Apart from adoption breakdowns, many families live together in chronic unhappiness and may wish that the adoption never took place. We must learn from that experience, and from the experience of agencies such as After Adoption, which is a voluntary agency in Greater Manchester which gives counselling to those who have been affected by adoption. Unless we learn from experience and improve standards for adoption in this country, we shall not ensure that intercountry adoptions are successful, which is what the Bill seeks to achieve.

The last time I asked the Department of Health for statistics was prior to 1997, which is a key date for the House. The statistics it kept on adoptions were fairly minimal, particularly those on adoption breakdowns, which would help us to understand better the factors that indicate success. That is an important issue, because, if people are preparing reports on potential adoptive parents and are asking questions about their lives and personal relationships, they should know why they need to ask those questions. Indeed, sometimes I wondered about some of the questions that I was having to ask. If we understood the key factors in predicting a successful outcome, the home study reports could be constructed so that questions were pertinent and served a useful purpose.

The quality of information about successful adoptions should be improved, as should the standards of adoption in this country. A number of agencies apply good practice, but that can be achieved only with proper dissemination of information. It should be made clear that we want high standards, and that hon. Members do not give this matter a low priority.

I particularly welcome the clause that makes it a criminal offence not to comply with the regulations. It is horrifying that people who have been assessed as unsuitable can commission poor-quality, private home study reports that describe them in glowing terms. That clause will also stop illegal trafficking. As I understand it, at the moment prosecutions, can only take place within six months of a couple committing the offence of bringing the child into the country. All couples need to do to escape prosecution, therefore, is to hide the child for six months. The clause will put a stop to that.

I welcome the Bill. It is important that the House debates these issues that affect children. I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester, and I am happy to support his Bill.

10.23 am

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I, too, support the Bill. Indeed, I have yet to hear anyone speak against it. I hope that other hon. Members will co-operate in giving it a speedy passage. Much as we want to speak at length on the important principles raised by the Bill, it is necessary that the House moves on.

It is appropriate that the Bill is proposed in the 10th anniversary year of the United Nations declaration on the rights of the child. I know that the Bill has strong support from the United Nations Children's Fund. As UNICEF said in its literature supporting the Bill, it was only after the second world war that intercountry adoption took off and UNICEF was formed.

It is worth bearing in mind the rationale for intercountry adoption. In India, which has the largest child population of any country in the world, there is a presumption that local adoption is preferable. I am sure that that is right. It should not be assumed that, because intercountry adoption might provide a child with a wealthier family in a wealthier country, that would be better for the child.

I welcome the principles in the Hague convention. Articles 4 and 5 get to the heart of the matter. The first points out that the decision to adopt intercountry should be governed by the best interests of the child, and specifically excludes any monetary consideration.

Article 5 deals with the suitability of parents. We must face some hard truths. Some parents may be suitable, but not as suitable as others. They may not succeed in applying to adopt of a child in this country, but they may, nevertheless, meet basic standards on their ability as parents. It may be appropriate, therefore, to consider them in relation to the adoption of children from other countries. Why may that be so?

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. St. Aubyn: Let me develop my point.

In common with many thousands of school leavers, I worked for a year as a volunteer in a children's home in the third world. Children cared for in an institution in a developing country may face a far better prospect in life if they are taken out of the institution and given a home life by a family in this country. Although some parents may not be regarded as suitable for a British child, such a family could provide a warm, home environment.

None of us can claim to be perfect parents. Local authorities, on which the Bill places a responsibility, must be given clear and unequivocal guidelines by the Department so that they understand that they have a remit to provide not only the very best families for adopted children, but a wide range of families who meet clear, minimum standards, rather than harder tests. Some local authorities impose unreasonable tests. They may involve questions about the life style or the health of the family which perhaps do not test the ability to provide proper parenting.

Mr. Dawson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me a chance to respond to his extraordinary comments. I should like him to develop the idea that he seems to have that there are some qualities that families adopting British children need to have that are not required of families who adopt children from abroad. What are those qualities? If he cannot give me a clear answer, he is taking a naive and extremely dangerous course.

Mr. St. Aubyn: That intervention shows why we must listen carefully to what each other says. That is not what I said. I was picking up the comment of the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), who said that potential parents who were wrong for adoption of a child from this country were also not suitable to adopt a child from another country. I am sure that we all agree on that. Equally, those who are unequivocally right for adoption of children in this country would also be right for adoption of children from another country. But there is a third group of parents who are up to the mark for adoption in this country, but who are not as good as some of the other parents wanting to adopt the limited number of children available for adoption here. That third group should be taken into account by local authorities.

Mr. Oaten: This is an important point, and the House is in danger of misunderstanding the hon. Gentleman. Is he suggesting that there is a class A and a class B set of parents? If so, that would certainly lead us down a dangerous path.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The word "class" left the hon. Gentleman's lips, not mine. I do not think that any class element is involved in the performance of parents, or in any other aspect of the Bill. The process of adoption is a selection process, and in every selection process choices must be made.

The hon. Gentleman may consider this politically incorrect, but the fact is that, although many couples in this country are capable of becoming very good parents, not all of them will have the opportunity to adopt a British child, because a limited number are available for adoption. Every year, however, 20,000 children are adopted intercountry, and such parents may be able to provide excellent homes for some of them, although they might not be the first choice of their local authorities if a child became available in their area. That is worlds apart from thinking in terms of different classes of parent for

[Mr. St. Aubyn]

different classes of child. We regard the rights of the child as universal: that is the point of the Hague convention, and that is why we shall support the Bill.

Mr. Dawson: With the greatest respect, no one who regards the rights of the child as universal can argue that adopters of lesser quality, who do not meet the standards required for the adoption of British children, are suitable to adopt children from other countries. That is racist.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is in danger of being caught out by his emotions. He should view the matter in a more detached way.

We must bear in mind the interests of a child reared in an institution in a developing country. Having worked in such an institution, I can say that such a child has nothing like the life style and opportunities that a caring family home can provide, even one in a country foreign to the child. In this country, the demand among childless couples is far greater than the supply of children suitable for adoption. Local authorities must be very conscious of that in the running of their systems and the drawing up of lists of adopters.

Dr. Gibson: Are not differences between life chances in this country as great as the difference between the place where the hon. Gentleman worked and somewhere in this country? Every day, we read of differentials between groups in this country, and the differing opportunities for young people and, indeed, people of all ages. People have different backgrounds and different life chances depending on where they live. How does the hon. Gentleman measure differences between two countries as against differences between the north and the south of England?

Mr. St. Aubyn: That is well beyond the remit of the Bill. All we can say is that children in unfortunate circumstances have an even more pressing need for a good family home. In this country, few children are in institutional care, which creates a different balance between supply and demand.

I am sorry that the Bill does not provide better guidance in one regard. I am thinking of cases in which, after the proper procedures have taken place and a child has been adopted in this country in the belief that his or her family are deceased, a family member comes to light. There was such a case a few years ago: a child from the former Yugoslavia was adopted in this country, and it was then discovered that she had a grandfather living in Switzerland.

Under the Bill, if a competent court determines that there are reasons for an adoption order to be cancelled, it will be cancelled. What is to be done if a competent court in this country decides that an order should not be cancelled, while an equally competent court in the country where the family member resides—which is also signed up to the convention as a participating state—decides that it should be cancelled, and that the child should return to live with its natural relations? The case to which I referred earlier caused great difficulty. The eventual judgment showed the wisdom of Solomon and managed to balance all the interests involved, but that was a specific case. How, in general terms, is a conflict between two competent courts to be resolved?

I am pleased that this adoption Bill covers intercountry aspects, but it is now well over 20 years since we had a fully fledged adoption Bill. The last Government tried to introduce one with cross-party support, but it fell before the last election owing to a collapse in interparty co-operation, which was very regrettable. There is an urgent need for the Adoption Act 1976 to be revised. I hope that, in passing the Bill, the House does not miss the point that there are many United Kingdom-related aspects of adoption, and that the passing of the Bill is no excuse for deferring action on those aspects at the earliest opportunity.

10.36 am

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I am grateful for the chance to speak. I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) both on his good fortune—although I suppose that we should not congratulate people on having had good luck, especially when we have lost out—and on having the wisdom to take on such an important Bill. I listened with great interest to his excellent speech. As a member of the ex-social workers' fraternity—but not because of that—I also wish to associate myself with another excellent speech, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey).

While I am in congratulatory mode, let me congratulate the Government, and the Minister in particular. The Bill, which is long overdue, is another example of the Government's commitment to children. Last week, we considered the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill, which enshrines crucial parts of the Pigot report, published 10 years ago, and tremendous work is being done for children who must be looked after. Moreover, the Prime Minister has made a personal commitment to ending child poverty early in the next century.

I know that many Members wish to speak, but let me add that I am convinced that, before long, the Government will pursue their own logic and establish a United Kingdom commissioner for children's rights, as well as withdrawing all reservations on the United Nations convention on children's rights.

I thought that this would prove to be the least controversial Bill of the year, and in terms of its substantive nature that is highly likely; but I must tell the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) that, although I entirely agree with him about the need for a new adoption Act, I hope that he will reflect on some of what he said earlier. It leads us down a dangerous road. Such a system, if implemented—which it will not be—could put children coming into this country at grave risk of abuse.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I do not know what remarks the hon. Gentleman is attributing to me. All I am saying is that, as well as those parents who are suitable and successfully adopt children in this country, there are other parents who may be suitable—who almost certainly are suitable—but whom local authorities are failing to identify. That is the nub of those remarks. Surely he would agree that that is happening in this country.

Mr. Dawson: I do not want desperately to pursue that line, but what the hon. Gentleman has just said is slightly different from what he said earlier, where he implied—in fact, he did more than imply; he stated that local

government and social service departments need not be so rigorous in their assessment of prospective adopters of children from abroad. Perhaps he will get the opportunity to clarify the matter, but it takes us away from the substance of the Bill.

Adoption is profound and irrevocable. It is a great necessity in the protection of children nationally and internationally. I am pleased that the Bill enables the UK to ratify the 1993 Hague convention on protection of children and co-operation in respect of intercountry adoption. As the hon. Member for Guildford acknowledged, it is founded on the UN convention on the rights of the child, in particular, article 21.

It is important to reflect on the fact that we are talking about not the rights of adults to adopt, but the rights of children. Article 21 clearly sets out to ensure that the adoption of a child is authorised only by competent authorities, recognising that intercountry adoption may be considered as an alternative means of child care if the child cannot be placed in a foster or adoptive family or cannot be cared for in his or her country in a suitable manner.

The article aims to ensure that the child who is adopted in another country enjoys safeguards and standards that are equivalent to those on national adoption, and that intercountry adoption placement does not result in improper financial gain. Those are important issues on which to reflect.

We have heard some criticism of social service authorities. I would be the first to criticise many such authorities, but many of the problems to which people allude are to do with resources, pressures on the authorities and the necessary complexity and rigour of the assessment of prospective adoptive parents. There may be a case for examining those procedures, but let no one imagine that they should be watered down, or that we should not look carefully into the most personal, private and important aspects of the adults' relationships and ability to look after and to adopt a child.

I do not want to make too many more remarks. We have to examine intercountry adoption and the backing of article 21 in the light of other parts of the UN convention. Article 23 requires due regard to be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. Article 7 relates to the child's right to know and to be cared for by parents and family, and article 8 to the child's right to preserve identity.

I support the Bill absolutely. It will represent in this country a great improvement in services for children who come from other countries. I hope that it will also represent part of the Government's commitment to ensure that the Hague convention is ratified throughout the world. I do not look to the Bill to develop intercountry adoption services. Such services need to be clarified and to be part of the local government mainstream, but the answer for children who live in dire poverty and distress is to sort out the problems in those countries, to develop services there and to reduce the need for intercountry adoption. However, while such adoption is desirable and in the best interests of particular children, it should occur.

I look to those services continuing in the light of crucial concepts, which are already embodied in the Children Act 1989. They include the paramountcy principle of the child's best interests. Where appropriate—bearing in mind the child's age—we must also take close account of the child's wishes and feelings. I am pleased to have had the chance to support the Bill and hope that it will have a good passage thorough the House.

10.47 am

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I do not want to detain the House long because I detect a large element of cross-party agreement on the Bill. Indeed, the way in which it has been debated is a credit to the proceedings of the House. It is a good day for the Chamber. It is exactly the sort of legislation that can be championed by a private Member. It brings credit to the House, which is often lambasted for yah-boo politics across the Dispatch Boxes. To that end, I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) not only on introducing the Bill, but on the way in which he put his case.

Clearly, the country needs a proper legal framework for intercountry adoption; no one here disagrees with that. On behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition, I give the Bill an overall and general welcome. The sooner we get it into Committee and can look at its detail, the better. At heart, we all agree on the principle that lies behind it. We think that we will be living in a better country and that it will be better for children who are adopted from another country if we can get the Bill on to the statute book.

One thing needs to be said, even though anyone who has thought about the issue deeply will, perhaps even indignantly, take it as a given: adoption is a proper, decent and commendable arrangement to which no stigma or disapproval should attach. Some people still get a bit sniffy about it and think that those people who adopt a child are a little odd. That view has to be slammed. Adoption is honourable, worthy and responsible.

The hon. Member for Winchester stayed clear of debating at length existing domestic arrangements for adoption. As my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) said, perhaps those merit further debate and consideration. I do not think that intercountry adoption can be totally separated from intracountry adoption. They are two arms of the same procedure, for the same purpose.

I think that all hon. Members—after reading our constituency mailbag or having spoken to people affected by adoption—still have concerns that there are too many unhappy tales of the way in which social services have conducted their scrutiny, and either approved or disapproved of potential parents for adoption purposes. I am very familiar with one case in which both parents—one black, one white; both graduates—were told that they could not adopt a child because it was not thought appropriate that mixed-race parentage should apply. We want to ensure that all decisions based on such thinking are eradicated in the United Kingdom.

The current domestic scrutiny process was perhaps at the root of the misunderstanding that I detected between the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson)—whose very first intervention was spot on—and my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford.

The House should reflect on the fact that some people feel quite strongly that adoption within one's own country is a more natural, appropriate and comfortable state of affairs than actively seeking to adopt a child from another country, for whatever reasons. There are serious issues on both sides of that argument, and they require serious

[Mr. Alan Duncan]

thought, and perhaps a bit more serious debate, hand in hand with an understanding of how social services should behave and assess people in approving adoption in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer)—who has left the Chamber—made a very thoughtful speech, in which he warned of the dangers of believing that all adoptions from a poorer to a wealthier country were invariably better for the child. He clearly put a lot of thought into the issue, which undoubtedly will be raised in Committee.

The hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) explained why intercountry adoption was growing. However, as I said, I hope that the House will accept that many people hold the view that intercountry adoption should be the exception rather than the rule. None the less, a proper legal framework is required. The hon. Lady, too, clearly had her doubts about the appropriateness of intercountry adoption, particularly as a solution to the plight of those who have been displaced by conflict.

Perhaps I should say, in passing, that the interest shown by my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford in the issue might be explained by the fact that he has so many children of his own—I am told that it is a growing band.

The issue is a deeply emotional and extremely important one. However, as one may have detected in the widespread agreement on it in the House, it is not an essentially contentious issue. The Bill's detail will be considered in Committee, and I hope that those proceedings will demonstrate the same high standards of debate and thought that, so far, today's debate has shown.

The Opposition have some concerns about the growth of intercountry adoption. However, we welcome the Bill's introduction as a way of introducing a proper framework of law for future practice, for the benefit of children.

10.53 am

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I add my congratulations to those already offered to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on promoting the Bill. I also recognise the importance of the consultations conducted by the previous Government, and the hard work of all those who formulated the Hague convention, which has gained so much support in other countries. If ever there was an act of international human solidarity, the Hague convention is it; it is the exact opposite of ethnic cleansing.

Intercountry adoption allows a child without a family to be accepted, loved and supported by parents, regardless of nationality and national boundaries—and I say that although I accept all the concerns expressed by hon. Members on the need not to expand intercountry adoption. When possible, children should remain in the country in which they were born.

I am pleased to note that the Hague convention is based on the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. The Hague convention—and now the Bill—is intended essentially to safeguard children, and to ensure that adoption is in their long-term good, not simply to meet the short-term needs of adults.

The hon. Member for Winchester and other hon. Members with a relevant professional background have outlined the Bill's legal basis and importance in clarifying the issues for the 60 countries—including our own—that we hope shall soon ratify the convention and accept procedures and regulations to be followed by everyone.

Simply knowing which countries have reciprocal adoptive agreements will be a huge step forward. Parents sometimes spend months in corresponding, making telephone calls and preparing to visit a particular country, only to discover that that country will not allow intercountry adoptions with the United Kingdom. The possibility of clear and consistent guidance and advice would offer those parents enormous relief. Social services and solicitors in the United Kingdom, and high commissioners and consulates abroad, should all work from the same script and to the same basic guidelines.

Recently, I heard of a British solicitor who unintentionally caused unnecessary work, thereby causing delay and higher costs, because he was not clear on the procedures. I have also recently heard of a high commissioner who almost invalidated 18 months of planning and negotiation by claiming that a medical document was not necessary, whereas it was vital before the child could leave the country of origin.

Costs are another concern, and have already been mentioned in the debate. Although the Bill cannot be prescriptive, it does address the issue of adoption costs and other expenses—which are vital in all adoption work. There are very high costs for parents involved in intercountry adoption, and they should have more information on those costs. There will also have to be some standardisation of costs, which should perhaps be abolished in some cases.

As hon. Members have said, social services charge for home visits. As we also know, charges vary tremendously from one social services department to another. In one case, a social services department charged £3,000 for adoption services, to which £500 was added to cover the social worker's travel costs. That is the type of daunting first hurdle faced by prospective parents, who need fairness and clarity. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) said, those costs continue.

Perhaps the greatest variable is the legal agency fees that are charged in the country of origin. Based on my inquiries, those charges seem to range from £250 to £18,000. I am not suggesting that we are able to dictate legal costs—we cannot do it nationally, so we shall certainly not do it internationally—but I trust that, with the ratification of the Hague convention and streamlining, such costs can at least be standardised. Certainly in some cases, those costs should fall.

Families will welcome the proposed amendment to nationality legislation, allowing children of a convention adoption to enter the country as British citizens, and for the procedure in the United Kingdom to take six months rather than one year. I do not think that the possible vulnerability of a child in that first year is fully appreciated. After years of preparing to bring a child to the UK, a further year of legal and social services scrutiny is daunting. Practical issues such as child care benefit and maternity leave also need careful consideration.

Mutual support and continuing guidance for adoptive parents and adopted children would be welcomed by those to whom I have spoken. One welcome consequence of the Bill will be that organisations such as the association of families who have adopted from abroad and Childlink will flourish and there may be more local groups to add

support. When the process of intercountry adoption is less fraught and traumatic, families will be able to think and plan for the future with more confidence.

One family to whom I have spoken made a plea for the recognition of the value of intercountry adoption rather than the reluctant support from social service workers that we have heard about and the more hostile, suspicious and even contemptuous attitudes of others. The Bill, with all-party support, will send a clear message to all those involved that the House recognises and values the commitment of families who have been brought together through intercountry adoption and wishes them well.

I do not underestimate the challenges that the arrival, by birth or adoption, of a child from another country brings to any family. The challenges and rewards of adopting a child from abroad are similar in some ways, but very different in others. With so much racial tension and ethnic cleansing dominating our news, the Bill could pave the way for greater international understanding. One mother has told me that she recently took her seven-year-old son back to see the country in which he was born and that the whole family has a growing interest in, and appreciation of, that country.

11.2 am

Mr. Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on introducing the Bill. I do not know him well, but his choice of Bill, having been fortunate enough to obtain such a prominent position in the ballot, says much about his priorities and values. If the Bill is passed, it will bring down the curtain on 10 years of detailed consultation and debate, helping to put in place a legal framework for this important issue. Adoption law is governed mainly by the Adoption Act 1976. At that time, intercountry adoption was not the issue that it is today.

Several hon. Members have said that this is not a contentious issue, but it is a complex one, not only in UK law, but because the measures have to work internationally. The Bill will affect relatively few children and families, but it should still be a priority for the House, because the children involved are in a particularly vulnerable position and they are a growing group. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) gave some figures earlier. I believe that the number of children involved has increased from around 100 in 1993 to 300 now. In the region that my hon. Friend and I represent, the number of children involved has increased dramatically from six to 38 during that time. We have to get the procedures right for all those children.

Getting the procedures right is not easy. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), I confess to being a member of the honourable band of ex-social workers who now occupy the Labour Benches. Much of my 15 years as a social worker was spent in residential social work. For several years I was the officer in charge of a residential assessment centre. I was responsible for managing the reception of children into care. Sometimes that was done in a planned way, but often it was done in an unplanned way in the middle of the night or after emergency court proceedings. That could be distressing for all concerned. I managed the team that assessed the needs of particular children. I worked with colleagues in evaluating the options available for the children and then initiating and supporting placements for them. Sometimes, happily, those placements would be back at home with their own family. On other occasions, they would be foster placements and on others they would rightly be in another form of residential care.

I risk stating the obvious when I say that I learned two things in particular during those years in residential social work. First, every child is unique. Each child has their own history, their own personality and their own talents. The interplay of nature and nurture, the impact of deprivation and abuse and the response of each child to interest, love and support are different in every case. That individuality can be even more pronounced and important in cases of intercountry adoption.

Secondly, I learned what I might call the golden rule of child care, which is that the welfare of the child must always be paramount. That is a key issue in family placements, be they foster placements or adoptions. The child needs shelter, warmth, security and love. The family also needs to love and to be loved. They want to provide physically and emotionally for the child in their care and to find the unique fulfilment that parenthood brings. I do not agree with those who argue that that should all be done only for altruistic reasons. The needs of the adopting or fostering family must be recognised, because family placements are successful only with such a two-way relationship. However, the welfare of the child must always take precedence over any other interests. I am sure that, like me, other hon. Members who have been involved in social work remember couples who were excellent and had much to offer, but who were not suitable for particular children to whom they may have been introduced. We cannot afford to get that wrong with adoption, because the process creates a permanent legal relationship between the child and the adoptive parents and severs all legal ties with the birth parents. It is the most significant decision that anybody can take about a child.

We have heard that intercountry adoption is a growing issue. Ease of travel makes it simpler and telecommunications also play a part. We regularly see distressing and moving images on television of children in desperate situations—in Romanian orphanages, the child victims in Bosnia, the street children of Latin America or the displaced refugee children from Kosovo. However, the issue cannot be left to emotion and personal decision. We need a properly regulated process and institutions that can judge the fitness of families and the appropriateness of a child being placed for adoption. Our institutions and procedures should be able to speed up the process when necessary, but they also need to be able to stop the process if it is not correct.

In preparing for the debate, I have looked at several cases of intercountry adoption on which the High Court has been asked to rule. They prove beyond doubt the need for clear procedures and regulation. The first case is that of a British couple who adopted a child in El Salvador. The couple were too old to adopt children in the United Kingdom and went to El Salvador where they paid a lawyer £5,000 to effect the adoption of the child. The child was adopted under that country's law. I make no judgment about the couple—I do not know them and have never met them. The House will be interested to know that the judge ruled in favour of adoption, in the best interests of the child. However, even a cursory glance at the case would show hon. Members that it was a far from satisfactory way for a child to be adopted.

[Mr. Paul Goggins]

The second case involves a Bosnian baby, whose family was attacked in 1992 and whose mother and various family members were killed. The father went missing and the child was placed in an orphanage and, while there, was introduced to a British couple. They brought the child to England to receive medical attention. In December 1993, they applied to adopt the child. Incredibly, no guardian ad litem was appointed; it was publicly known—so the court would have known—that the Red Cross was opposed to the adoption of war orphans; and the court had no proof that the child was free for adoption. Incredibly, nevertheless, in January 1994, an adoption order was made. Later that year, members of that little girl's family began to re-emerge. They applied to the court for a contact order and, eventually, appealed against the adoption order. The outcome was that the girl was made a ward of court and placed with the couple as foster parents. However, again, we observe a system and a procedure that, I argue, is deeply flawed.

The third case is that of a couple in Pakistan who made a gift of their unborn child to a childless Pakistani couple living in the UK. When the child was born, the childless couple went to live in Pakistan, staying there for three years. They then returned to England bringing the child with them; the child was an illegal entrant to this country. They applied for adoption, but were turned down. The judge ruled that public policy took priority over the child's needs. The couple appealed and won because, ultimately, the decision and the final judgment was that the child's welfare came first—one might argue that that was right—and was best served by being placed with that family.

I bring those cases to the attention of the House because it shows that even the procedures and processes that are in place in the 1990s are not acceptable. The hon. Member for Winchester referred to the growing number of cases of children involved in intercountry adoptions that begin under the cover of darkness—I think he gave the number as 100. It is probably impossible to estimate how many such cases there are, because we simply do not know; it would not surprise me if the number was greater than 100. Children are being bought and sold, and relationships are being initiated and maintained in a wholly illegal way. It is vital that there are proper procedures and regulations; we must have competent authorities and organisations, and effective law.

Some argue that this is all red tape—busy social workers, lawyers and others getting in the way of human contact in this important human process. However, I argue strongly that we need proper regulation of these matters because, ultimately, we are dealing with the protection of vulnerable children. We must carry that out properly.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am listening carefully and with great interest to the hon. Gentleman, who obviously has extensive knowledge of the subject. In relation to the first case that he mentioned—the couple who would have been too old to adopt under UK regulations—is he implying that, in all cases, if a couple is too old, in the judgment of a local authority, to adopt a British child, they are too old to adopt a child from an overseas country, even though they might have attributes and qualities that make them especially well-suited to adopt such a child?

Mr. Goggins: That echoes some of the earlier exchanges in the debate. We cannot have one rule for children in this country and another for children from other countries. There must be one rule for one and all. Indeed, we have a universal declaration relating to that matter. That important point needs to be emphasised and I welcome the opportunity to underline it.

As many hon. Members have already pointed out, the Bill would enable the Government to ratify the 1993 Hague convention on international adoption. As has also been pointed out, the UK helped to draw up the convention and we have signed it, but are unable to ratify it because of the current legal position. If the Bill becomes law, we will be able to ratify it, which will be welcome.

The convention appears to me to combine high principle with common sense. It underlines several important points. It stresses that a child's development takes place best in a family where he or she can experience "happiness, love and understanding"—in the words of the convention. It states that everything should be done to support a child within his or her own family. It is important that such statements should be included in the convention, but obviously it focuses mainly on intercountry adoption.

The convention formalises the responsibilities of central authorities, in both the state of origin of the child and the receiving country, and charges them with some important responsibilities. The first is that they ensure that the child is adoptable. Secondly, they must ensure that a placement in the state of origin has already been considered. Thirdly, they must ensure that if a placement outside the country of origin is being considered, it is in the best interests of the child. Fourthly, they must ensure that consent is given to the adoption procedure and that, when the child is of a sufficient age, the child's consent is also given. That important point has not been strongly made in the debate so far. Fifthly—and crucially—they must ensure that no consideration other than the child's welfare should be taken into account and that financial considerations should certainly not be involved.

I want briefly to draw the House's attention to two clauses in the Bill. The first is clause 11. If intercountry adoption is not carried out by an adoption agency, there is a requirement of 12 months residency before the adoption can take place. The clause reduces that period to six months, when adoption agencies are involved. I have made some inquiries about that matter, because the House needs to ensure that the reduction from 12 to six months is satisfactory. The evidence that I have received shows that six months is sufficient to ensure both that due care and attention is given and that there is no undue delay in the process, so that the adoption can go ahead as swiftly as possible.

Clause 14 toughens the law on action against those who do not follow the regulations, so that, if a person is habitually resident in the UK and brings into this country a child who is habitually resident in another state, that person has committed a criminal offence. The time period for summary proceedings to be brought will be six months from the time that sufficient evidence comes to the attention of the prosecutor—not six months from the time

that the alleged offence took place. That is most important: it is not enough to dodge for six months—the relevant time will be six months from the time when the evidence comes to light. We must emphasise that it is wrong to act outside the scope of the law. Whatever the motivation of would-be adoptive parents, those who do wrong should be penalised. That is an important aspect of the Bill.

I want to make two final points. All of us, even hon. Members, become extremely emotional about the welfare of children—especially deprived children. Many of us are aware that our constituents regularly donate money, toys and clothes and respond to appeals—especially the recent appeals of the international aid agencies. We try to do what we can to use our resources to support children in need.

During my research for today's debate, I came across a letter published in *The Guardian* in July 1994 from a woman who had adopted a child from a Romanian orphanage. Her letter evokes the understandable emotion that we all feel when faced with such cases, stating:

"Those of us who adopted from Romania cry with rage at the attitude of the British adoption professionals, and of the British and Romanian governments, towards inter-country adoption.

We've only rescued a handful of children. We can never, ever, forget the children we left behind, and the conditions in which we left them. Please can't some of them be adopted into families?

Please?"

That is a heartfelt plea, but the needs of the child are paramount, and children in desperate situations are in special need of our protection. My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre mentioned the UN convention on the rights of the child, article 21 of which states that intercountry adoption should be considered only

"If the child cannot . . . in any suitable manner be cared for in the child's country of origin".

Emotion is not enough.

Although we are all moved by pictures of destitute, deprived and poverty-stricken children, we must recognise that, ultimately, the real answer to their predicament lies not in intercountry adoption, but in the sort of action that my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development are taking to ensure that the poorest countries of the world obtain debt relief and are given the sort of aid and financial support that they need to develop sustainable economic programmes. That action is designed to make sure that children in the poorest countries have proper standards of education and health care and that they are supported in the pursuit of jobs. That has to be our ultimate goal, but in the small number of cases in which intercountry adoption is the right and best course of action, the Bill will help to ensure proper control and regulation. In that spirit, I offer my full support for the Bill.

11.22 am

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on having chosen such an important Bill to promote and eschewing the attractions of choosing a more high-profile, but doomed, subject simply for the publicity. He has grasped the tough and tender aspects of intercountry adoption: where such adoptions are appropriate, the Bill makes the process smoother, but where they are inappropriate—indeed, criminal—the Bill strengthens the sanctions.

The few hon. Members here will know that I am not entirely wedded to the concept of consensus, so, in a small digression on a partisan note, I should like to say that the hon. Gentleman has also done the House a service by beating the appalling Gerry Malone, not once, but twice in this Parliament. In the class of 1997, he distinguishes himself by having made two maiden speeches during his parliamentary career. I should be grateful if he would pass on the secret of turning a majority of two into one of 20,000—not that I need an increase of such magnitude, but I would appreciate a small part of it.

It is important to see the Bill in the wider context of adoption and to take into account the sensitive issues of caring and emotion that surround it. It is a truism that all societies will be judged by the way in which they treat their children, but they will be further judged by the way in which they treat their less well-off, most deprived children and those who live in horrendous circumstances, such as a war zone.

There is much that we can do, both in our home adoption system and in intercountry adoption, which should be seen as an important element within our home adoption system. Intercountry adoption is not an adjunct, a process with a different set of criteria, or an alternative route for those who fail to secure adoptions of home children, but a part—albeit a unique part—of our wider home adoption system. It is important that the Bill does not introduce peculiar criteria for judging those eligible to adopt, simply because of the nature of the societies from which the children may come.

I have no professional experience of adoption. I am not and have never been a social worker, so I bow to the expertise of those hon. Members on both sides of the House who have been. Unlike some, I do not decry or demonise social workers, because I believe that they do a useful and extremely important job for society. I have some personal experience of adoption, in that my older brother, who sadly died some 20 years ago, was adopted; I never thought of him as anything but my brother. However, with the indulgence of the House, I shall dwell on my father's experience; it may not, at first glance, appear relevant, but it does relate to intercountry adoption and the treatment of children. Given the tale I shall tell, let me express the hope that the treatment of children has moved on since my father's time.

My father was born in 1933 in north-west Donegal. There was nowhere more conservative than rural Ireland in the 1930s, and in Donegal one reached the nether reaches of that conservatism. He was born of an illicit relationship between an 18-year-old woman and someone from the north of the county—I say "someone" because I do not know the identity of my paternal grandfather, although I am still looking. Given the circumstances, the child welfare system that prevailed at that time in that place immediately whisked my father to the county orphanage in Stranorlar and packed his mother off to England, where she was to live with relatives and never again darken any door in Donegal.

In some senses, my father was in a similar position to those children who might become the grateful recipients of a home via the provisions of the Bill, because he languished in the orphanage for three years. However,

[Mr. Tony McNulty]

he was lucky: I do not know the details—I am still investigating—but a family called MacFadden from north Donegal took him in and subsequently raised him as their own child. Although they were not kin to my father, I have always regarded the MacFaddens as my blood relatives and I continue to visit them regularly. My father's escape from the orphanage was via an informal route—he was never adopted. He then followed the classic Irish pattern of coming over to England aged 14 or 15 and building his life securely here.

That is the general background, but what my father lost because of that background is important in terms of the human aspects of the Bill. I have looked long and hard for the jigsaw pieces that will give me some sense of my family background in Donegal. My father never knew his mother and when I tried to follow her trail, I found myself bereft of clues and avenues to explore. Every time I got close, walls were put up—those sensitive issues of caring and emotion that I referred to earlier came into play, albeit to negative effect.

I finally put the jigsaw pieces together only five years ago when I discovered not only the identity of my grandmother—who had sadly died—but a range of relatives from Britain, Ireland and America unknown to me or my father. Most dramatically, I had the pleasure of introducing my father to his half-sister after 50 years. Following my father's experiences in an orphanage and of semi-adoption, I was able to complete the circle by uncovering at least some of his background. I still have some way to go, but that thumbnail sketch of child welfare in the past demonstrates that we must treat adoptions, both domestically and between countries, sensitively.

We must not be complacent about Britain's domestic adoption system. Although it remains second to none, some aspects of it cause concern—particularly the bureaucracy, level of detail and the time that the adoption process takes. The Bill's strength is that it seeks to graft the convention's legal framework on to the intercountry adoption process. We must strike a balance between delay and rigour in national and intercountry adoptions. We cannot sacrifice rigour for emotion.

As other hon. Members have said, of the 400 intercountry adoptions that take place every year, 300 take the legal route and 100 do not go through approved channels. We must seek to redress that balance in some way. The hon. Member for Winchester would be the first to say that the Bill does not provide all the answers: it does not make everything tickety-boo in the area of intercountry adoption. However, it is a move in the right direction. There will always be a steady stream of intercountry adoptions, and it is a pity that interest in such adoptions is heightened only when Ceausescu's Romania collapses or the plight of street children in Brazil is highlighted.

I shall demonstrate that I am not partisan by quoting a Tory: the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley). In introducing the previous Government's White Paper , she said:

"Adoption is about creating a loving and stable family upbringing which best provides for the child. The basic framework for adopting children remains sound."

I agree with that. She continued:

"Given their fundamental importance to the life of the child, all adoptions will continue to be authorised by the courts, advised as appropriate by social services authorities or adoption agencies, which are in turn advised by adoption panels."

The right hon. Lady was referring principally to the domestic adoption system, but the same rules should apply to intercountry adoptions. There must be a level playing field and good practice in all adoptions. That is why I welcome the Bill so warmly. It does not introduce secondary criteria or a secondary route for intercountry adoptions, although many people would like to see that. The right hon. Lady continued:

"Those who want to adopt children from abroad should have their wishes respected. In all suitable cases, such adoptions should be facilitated. However, the procedures must be proper."

They should fall in line with domestic arrangements. She went on:

"They must prevent abuse. We must aim for the same high level of protection and benefits for the child as in domestic adoptions."

One could add—it is implicit in the right hon. Lady's remarks—that "suitable" should mean taking full cognisance of the cultural, ethnic and social concerns of the child. As with domestic adoptions, the interests of the child must remain paramount. Intercountry adoption should take place if, and only if, it is in the interests of the child to leave his or her social, ethnic and historical background.

This is a controversial issue—not least because of the various elements associated with poverty and war. Hon. Members will have read the excellent brief prepared by the Library, which highlights some real concerns. I feared that my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins) was going to nick part of my speech regarding the case of Edita Keranovic, a four-year-old from Bosnia. That important case highlights some of the difficulties involved with intercountry adoptions. Edita was adopted by a family in the United Kingdom. According to press reports, in February 1997, a High Court judge ruled that the child should remain with the British family against the claims of her grandfather who emerged at some stage after the adoption. He had apparently been separated from her father by the Serbs. The grandfather never saw the father again, and his body was never found.

Mr. Oaten: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support. There is a particular problem involving children who are adopted from a war zone and whose relatives emerge later. The protocol in those circumstances is that adoptions should not take place until at least two years after the war is finished in an attempt to avoid the sort of problem to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Relatives of children may be dispersed in such circumstances, and we see examples of that in Kosovo at present.

Mr. McNulty: I am grateful for that intervention, and I endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments. I raised the case to highlight not only that point but another issue.

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): There has been turmoil in the Balkans for much longer than two years, so perhaps the two-year deadline is insufficient. It is difficult to see how a permanent adoption and settlement can follow an adoption from an emergency situation.

Mr. McNulty: We must explore that area more fully in Committee. Many—if not all—hon. Members have said

that the real strength of the Bill lies in the fact that it seeks to graft an already rigorous domestic system on to the intercountry adoption process. Secondary or alternative criteria should not apply to intercountry adoptions, but I am not sure whether we should apply explicit and distinct criteria to adoptions from zones of conflict in addition to criteria from the assorted conventions.

Mr. Oaten: I must clarify the point that I made about the period of time after which adoptions can take place in emergency situations. The critical factor is that the two-year rule applies after the conflict has ended. It does not matter how long that conflict has continued.

Mr. McNulty: It may be difficult to establish just when the conflict in the Balkans has concluded. That might be a further item for discussion in Committee.

I raise the case of Edita Keranovic in response to a letter from Catherine Stevens of the Romanian Orphanage Fund. She wrote:

"The case of Edita Keranovic . . . has once again focused attention on international adoption which, at best, offers a solution for a very small number of children and, at worst, makes large numbers of others vulnerable to exploitation.

Agencies such as the Romanian Orphanage Trust are working to promote long-term, in-country solutions to childcare problems in Central and Eastern Europe. We have had considerable success in Romania where we have got over 3,000 children out of orphanages and back into family life, entirely within the framework of Romanian law. Eighty per cent. of these children have returned to their original or extended family. Where this is not possible, there are plenty of Romanian families willing to adopt."

That relates to the stark point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East and demonstrates that the emotional argument that children who are not offered intercountry adoption will be left to languish in orphanages—we have seen the state of Ceausescu's orphanages—is not true. International bodies such as the Romanian Orphanage Trust and internal agencies in Romania and other countries first seek in-country solutions. That is appropriate and their efforts should be supported.

Catherine Stevens went on to say:

"Solutions can be found which prioritise the right and the best interests of children. These rights, and those of their families, should be safeguarded. International adoption"—

as the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) said—

"should never be the first recourse."

Even in a period of heightened conflict, when we see awful pictures of maltreatment and abuse of children in war zones, people should not go out to Romania, Kosovo, or wherever the conflict is taking place, take their pick of children and bring them back, assuming that they are doing the best for those children. The Bill reinforces that point.

The research paper says:

"The British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering . . . in its leaflet on intercountry adoption, tries to discourage stereotypes of intercountry adoption by pointing out that images of Romanian 'orphans' or South American street children, or reports of child-trafficking rings and 'baby-farms' are only part of a much larger jigsaw of the intercountry adoption picture."

That is equally true.

It is important to emphasise that the European Children's Trust fully supports the Bill, and says that there are four good reasons for doing so. First, as we have all agreed, the trust says that the Bill will improve the adoption process. It states:

"Social services departments will now need to improve their processes, speeding up adoptions and enabling more children to have a real home, giving them the best start in life."

I take on board the points made by my hon. Friends that improving the adoption process is desirable, but not at the expense of proper, rigorous, detailed checks and the accumulation of evidence.

Despite what I have said, child smuggling does go on, and putting an end to that is the trust's second reason for supporting the Bill. It says:

"Standardising the intercountry adoption procedure in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child . . . will put an end to these exploitative rings as well as unethical agencies interested only in profit and not children's welfare."

That may be too much to hope for, but it is none the less an important point.

The trust's third reason for supporting the Bill is that it will

"give more children a real chance of real home."

The trust says:

"Ratifying the 1993 Hague Convention will enable people from the UK to adopt from abroad with less red tape."

However, the adoption process will be subject to just as much rigour as at present. The fourth reason to support the Bill is that it will give more children greater protection, by

"making it a criminal offence to arrange for an adoption without meeting strict requirements."

As I have said before, the Bill takes a tough but tender approach to streamline the process but strengthen the criminalisation of procedures that fail to meet the necessary requirements, which are so important.

The trust believes—I like these little phrases—that

"Children have a future, the orphanages do not"—

"should not" would be more aspirational but more accurate. The trust believes also that

"family based care is better than institutional care for most children."

All my colleagues who are ex-social workers would agree, even though the final consequence of that policy would be to put some of them out of a job. By definition, family care must be better than institutional care. Finally, the trust states:

"Responsibility for the welfare of children should be taken by national bodies using local resources."

I warmly welcome the Bill as a step in the right direction. I am thankful that the hon. Member for Winchester did not offer it as the panacea for all that is wrong.

In the 1930s, my father was very lucky that the MacFadden family took him out of the county home and that he did not live in an orphanage until his adolescence. He was, however, dreadfully unlucky in that his real family remained unknown to him for more than 50 years, and that he was never to meet, know or hug his own mother. We must get to a stage where children's futures, in national and international adoptions, are not left to a lottery such as the one that my father had to endure.

[Mr. McNulty]

Systems and structures must be efficient and afford children the best life chances, ideally within the loving context of their own society and culture, but, where it is in the child's interest, through intercountry adoption. Children must come first but, as the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton said, intercountry adoption should still be the exception rather than the rule. Although it is the exception, it must be subject to a cogent, fair and effective legal framework, something that the Bill will begin to provide. As and when our home system is modified and improved in the ways that I and other hon. Members have suggested, I hope that we will put in place mechanisms equally to modify and improve the intercountry aspects of the adoption system.

Beyond that, I warmly welcome the Bill. Once more, I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester. I shall end by saying that the sooner that we move away from the war zone or poverty zone baby market for aspiring parents towards a legal framework that is fair to such parents and offers sensitivity and care to all children, the better. I commend the Bill to the House.

11.46 am

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I warmly welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate and, as other hon. Members have done, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on having the courage to take on this issue. I am disappointed that I was not here at the beginning of his speech, but I had a constituency appointment early this morning. I do not know whether he mentioned how he came to present the Bill to the House, but he brings it here with the good wishes of his constituents, who were given a say in his choice of Bill.

We should warmly welcome the fact that, for the second day running, the House has been at one on legislation that will benefit people. Yesterday, there was all-party support for the Disability Rights Commission Bill, which was given an unopposed Second Reading. Today, it is nice to witness the House coming together to debate useful legislation and enable it to make swift progress. I congratulate Conservative Front-Bench Members on the warm way in which they have supported the Bill.

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, I had the opportunity to spend a great deal of time working in orphanages and asylums across eastern Europe. I was in six or seven countries during their emergence from their old Communist regimes. In the countries in which I did most work—Romania, Albania, Hungary and Moldova—there was obviously a great deal wrong with the way in which children had been looked after.

I remember the undue haste with which people from all over Europe and outside the continent flocked, particularly to Romania, and latterly to Albania and Moldova, in the hope of finding a perfect child to adopt. In the main, most of them were looking for perfect children. I worked mainly in asylums, dealing with some of the most traumatic abuses of the old Communist regime, so I worked predominately with adults, both men and women, but I also spent a lot of time working in orphanages. I well remember the glee expressed by the controllers of those establishments when visitors arrived with their agents. Some of those agents, I am sad to say, were from Britain and others from Ireland but, in the main, they were from countries such as Romania.

If the children were old enough to walk, they would be paraded in front of the visitors but, if they were babies, the visitors would walk around the cots and look at the children. It was as if they were buying a dog for a child at Christmas. The process was pathetic and obscene, and it was obvious that action should be taken to stop it. Sadly, there were so many other priorities in a very difficult time for those countries that it was difficult for people in the countries involved to get to grips with what was going on.

Having now spoken to some of the politicians who came to the fore then, I know that many openly deny that they knew what was going on. That is a bizarre because the one certain thing is that, from no matter where in the political spectrum they came from, the people in power in eastern Europe knew what was going on. If they did not, they knew someone who did, who would certainly have told them. There is no excuse, except that the countries were in turmoil.

Soon after that, I became the leader of Hampshire county council. Our social services department was enlightened in encouraging help to eastern Europe but took a firm line on intercountry adoptions, being mindful of the problems that often accompany them. Sadly, there is abundant evidence that children who were adopted into this country ending up in local authority care because the novelty value wore off quickly. Such bitter experiences make me proud that Hampshire social services took a hard line on intercountry adoption.

I have first-hand experience of working in an orphanage in the middle of Transylvania. One little girl was adopted twice, once to France and once to Spain. While I was working there, she twice returned, once after six months and once after nine months. Can we imagine what that was like for her? She was picked because she was beautiful and stuck out in a crowd. She always had an appealing, beguiling smile that people liked, but she had had a horrendous life and was scarred by many bad circumstances, and that made her a difficult child to deal with in a home environment. The families probably had good intentions and thought that they were doing her a favour. In fact, they were doing themselves the bigger favour. They soon found that it was a mistake, and the girl ended up back in the same circumstances twice. Many others had serious problems.

The Bill is not perfect. Legislation will never be perfect until we realise the need for universal co-operation. We must closely examine the competence of the countries where the children originate. We must ensure that they have the facilities competently to deal with such children and the process of adoption, which is never easy. It is not easy in this country, and it is not easy when more than one country is involved.

There are many examples of the problems. I am privileged to be a member of the Council of Europe, where I serve on a committee that deals with children's issues. Like the United Nations, it takes human rights and the rights of the child seriously. The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) is the chairman of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee of the Council of Europe. He has done much work to target intercountry adoption and achieve recognition of the need for complete, rather

than partial, competence on the part of people who handle children. A child's life is a precious commodity, which we must cherish and handle carefully. I am delighted that the Council of Europe is bringing much pressure to be bear on countries, particularly in eastern Europe, and now elsewhere, that have been lax in dealing with the issue. I am delighted that United Kingdom social service departments have taken a tight line on intercountry adoption.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I have listened with interest to the hon. Gentleman. Could a child with a background such as that which he described in respect of the girl who was adopted twice ever be suitable for intercountry adoption? If so, would not the qualities that prospective parents would have to show be different from those required for a home adoption?

Mr. Hancock: I could not agree more. Few of the children with whom I worked were suitable for adoption out of their country. Many of their problems were peculiar to that country. Gypsy children of two, three and four had already had a flavour of life in their ethnic group but, for one reason or another, usually the economic decline of their family, were in orphanages. Many were not orphans in the true sense of the word. That is the other sad thing. There was a misleading belief that eastern Europe was full of orphanages with orphans as we understand the word—being without parents—but many were economic orphans. They were put in orphanages because families could no longer cope. It took time for people to acclimatise to the fact they were not dealing with children without family ties. Little or no effort was made to track down families.

I saw children leave homes because money had changed hands. It was horrendous. In the Transylvanian mountains, outside Brasov on the road to Sinaia, there were a couple of notorious homes. They were the first stopping point for anyone seeking a child. Once again, they were very selective. People sometimes took damaged children who needed more care and love than they were prepared to give. People who came to ease their consciences by offering a child a home made a big mistake. Children and families suffered. Siblings of those children in the United Kingdom and elsewhere suffered because the proper preparatory work was not done in either place.

The Bill will start to tighten or relax, as appropriate, the rules and regulations. It is to be welcomed, but we have to do more. The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) rightly highlighted the work of Romanian Orphanages Trust and other organisations working in countries such as Albania, even in the present difficult circumstances there. I was there last year, and I went there in the early 1990s, just after fall of the Hoxha regime, when I saw the size of the problem. They are making great efforts to accommodate children with loving, caring families, mainly from their own ethnic background, in their own country.

Bosnia and Croatia are good examples of countries where strong and successful efforts have been made to get to grips with what, in most circumstances, would be considered a real stain on the persona of a country—the fact that they had ignored, and in some instances responded grossly irresponsibly to, the needs of such children.

Things are starting to improve. I hope that the Bill will be a beacon of light to other nations in Europe and elsewhere, and persuade them to bring in similar legislation. We should take a universal approach. On a planet inhabited by 6 billion people, there are fewer than 60,000 elected Members of Parliament, but legislation like this, mirrored throughout the world, would be a beacon of light and hope for children in those difficult circumstances. It would clearly establish that the human rights of children are important, fundamental and to be protected. To use children as playful pawns, as one would a pet dog or cat at Christmas, is an obscenity, in any nation. I am delighted to say that the United Kingdom, as a result of this legislation, with Government support, will make a major step forward in the right direction and set a shining example to the rest of Europe and, I hope, the rest of the world.

11.59 am

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on his success in the ballot, on choosing this topic, and on his sensitive, careful and detailed speech.

The Bill's Second Reading debate is extremely timely, not only because of the 10th anniversary of the United Nations convention, but because of the conflict in the Balkans, which will inevitably encourage more people in western Europe, especially the United Kingdom, to take an interest in intercountry adoption as a genuine humanitarian response to the many thousands of individual personal tragedies that have resulted. It is absolutely right that the Bill is before us today, because it sets out a new regulatory framework, enables us to ratify the Hague convention and introduces many administrative procedures that will make things much better.

I am sceptical about much of the motivation for intercountry adoption. I endorse the comments of hon. Members—especially my hon. Friends the Members for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins) and for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey)—who have said that the real solution to the issue of children left without parents in countries that are struggling economically in eastern Europe and elsewhere is not to refine the process and encourage an increasing number of intercountry adoptions, but to establish social justice, universal health care and sustainable economic development in those countries.

Many hon. Members have spoken with great depth and conviction from wide professional experience—and, in some cases, from personal experience—but I had not thought deeply about the issue until recently. I especially want to contribute to the debate on behalf of two families in my constituency who brought their specific circumstances to my attention. I want to highlight the two issues that they brought to my attention, and invite the hon. Member for Winchester and the Minister to comment on them in their response to the debate.

Other hon. Members have mentioned the links between countries that may or may not have ratified the Hague convention, and that are certainly not in a condition of civil war, but from which there is a considerable community in the United Kingdom. I think of India, Pakistan, Cyprus and Turkey. I want to flag up the issue of adoption procedures that apply where families who are

[Mr. David Chaytor]

resident in the United Kingdom, but who have relatives in other countries wish to adopt a distant relative or a close friend of a distant relative. I want to show the existing administrative difficulties that get in their way, by highlighting the case of a constituent.

The constituent, whom I shall not name, who originally came from a different country, has been settled in the UK for many years. About seven years ago, he discovered and adopted a friend of a relative of the family—at the time, a young boy—who had lost his mother in tragic circumstances, was rejected by his father, found himself without anyone to care for him in his country of origin and was transported to the United Kingdom in ways that we need not go into.

For more than seven years, my constituent and his wife cared for that young man. They were the only people in the world who took responsibility for him, and obviously a profound bond developed between the informally adoptive parents and the young boy. The point came at which the question of official adoption arose. My constituents started to make the necessary applications for adoption, and found themselves bogged down in a quagmire of contradictory regulations. For much of the past seven years, and all of the past three years, they have been involved in endless communication with various Government Departments.

The case was taken up by my predecessor as Member of Parliament for Bury, North, who did his best to resolve it. The source of the problem was that the advice that he was given by the then Government was that it was not possible to resolve the adoption application until the entry clearance procedures had been approved. My constituents and the young man found themselves in a cleft stick. For seven years, they have lived under the potential threat of the person whom they love most in the world being deported, and with constant emotional pressure on their lives. I am delighted to say that, after representations from me, my hon. Friend the Minister has finally agreed that in this case, entry clearance should be given because of the obvious humanitarian reasons for it.

The case highlights the tip of the iceberg. Members of settled communities in Britain who, for the most genuine reasons, wish to adopt relatives or friends of relatives in their country of origin get bogged down in an appalling administrative nightmare. There is a Catch-22 situation. They cannot go through the adoption procedure until entry clearance has been sorted out, and entry clearance will not be considered until the adoption application has been resolved. I should be grateful if the hon. Member for Winchester would comment on that in his response to the debate.

The second case that I shall describe raises an entirely different point. As has been said, the Bill deals with one aspect of the raft of issues dealt with, or in some cases not dealt with, by the Adoption Act 1976. To their credit, the previous Government set in train a review of that Act and published a Green Paper, or possibly a White Paper, on the matter. Did the hon. Member for Winchester consider other aspects of the 1976 Act that are in need of reform?

One of the most worrying aspects of adoption for many people is the inequality of access to information about adopted relatives. I have a constituent whose life has been dominated by that. Again, I shall not name the individual, for reasons of confidentiality.

The sister of my constituent was adopted in 1954—45 years ago. For the whole of that time—for most of my constituent's life—she has been preoccupied with the fate of her adopted sister. She knows that she is alive, because the present system allows her to find that out, but she has no right of access to information about her. In many countries—the United States, New Zealand, Australia and the Scandinavian countries—there is equality of access to information for adopted relatives and birth relatives.

Did the hon. Member for Winchester consider that as another necessary reform of the 1976 Act? Will my hon. Friend the Minister comment on the matter? I raised it through a parliamentary question some weeks ago, in February, and I subsequently wrote to my hon. Friend about it. The initial response that I received was that the Government are not considering any further review of the 1976 Act. I wrote back to the Minister making a special plea because of the profound anguish that the issue causes so many birth relatives, and because there seems to be no argument against introducing such equality of access to information.

Although fewer and fewer children are up for adoption these days, we should remember that, in the immediate post-war period, many hundreds of thousands of children were adopted. We can be thankful that social conditions and social attitudes have changed, so that the number of children adopted shortly after birth has dramatically reduced.

Nevertheless, the lives of many thousands—if not hundreds of thousands—of individuals across the country have been dominated by the anguish of wondering what happened to their natural brothers or sisters, whom they may never have seen for the whole of their lives after they were adopted. I should be grateful if those points were picked up in the winding-up speech.

This important Bill will help us to ratify the Hague convention and will produce a sensible regulatory framework. It makes the necessary administrative improvements and deserves all-party support. There are on today's Order Paper other Bills deserving of all-party support, including my Bill—the Recycled Content of Newsprint Bill—and the Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill. This Bill certainly deserves such support and I wish it speedy progress through the House.

12.11 pm

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): I hesitate to speak because so many of my hon. Friends—and, indeed, colleagues on the other side of the House—have such distinguished and direct experience of the issues we are debating. Therefore I begin by declaring that I am not, and have never been, a social worker—at least, not until I became a Member of Parliament.

I declare my interest in, and support for, this important Bill and warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) first, on his fortune in the ballot and, in particular, on his judgment in selecting such an issue. By picking up the Bill and promoting it in the House, he is shedding light on a little-noticed legislative gap and on many of the policy issues arising from it, some of which have been raised today.

I also congratulate the hon. Gentleman on promoting the Bill in a way that commands cross-party support. Before I was elected to the House, I had the good fortune to draft two private Member's Bills, both of which became law. The first—the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986—was promoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), who then represented Monklands, West, and cross-party backing was crucial in forcing it through the House. The second—the Hearing Aid Council (Amendment) Act 1989—was promoted by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones).

I also congratulate the hon. Gentleman—and the Government, too—on the Government backing that he has for the Bill. It is probably the most essential component, given the vagaries of the private Member's Bill process.

Clearly, the Bill meets the need for new legislation to update adoption law, which is an example of social legislation lagging significantly behind social change. Since the passing of the last major piece of adoption legislation—the Adoption Act 1976—the number of adoptions has halved. Fewer babies and toddlers are being adopted, and a greater proportion of adoptions are of older children. More people are interested in adopting children from abroad and half of all adoptions, in contrast to 20 or 25 years ago, arise from remarriage.

In addition, the number of children available for domestic adoption has dropped and the number of people wishing to adopt has maintained its rate, so there has been a steady growth in intercountry adoptions in recent years. Considering the number of intercountry adoptions and the number of adoptions in this country of children from abroad, which the Department of Health estimates to be about 300 each year through the established channels, those who drafted the 1965 Hague convention simply could not have dreamed of such a level of international interest and cross-border adoption.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn)—I am sorry that he is not in his place—suggested that the increase in intercountry adoption began after the second world war, but it has taken place in only the past 20 or 25 years, not the past 50.

While I am on the subject, I should make it clear that it was not only my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) who objected to some of the hon. Gentleman's comments. All Labour Members present disagree with the idea that children adopted from another country could be adopted by parents who were not judged good enough or suitable to adopt children in this country.

Mr. Duncan: He did not say that.

Mr. Healey: I concede that the hon. Member for Guildford was somewhat confused and repetitious, but if he and the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) study *Hansard* on Monday morning, they will see that he did say that.

The increase in the number of intercountry adoptions in the past two decades has left us with no proper legal framework for dealing with them. We have no legislation to allow the UK to ratify the successor Hague convention that was thrashed out in 1993 and we have no criminal offence procedures to discourage adoption outside the proper, established channels. It is estimated that some 100 children a year—my hon. Friend the Minister may be able to confirm that figure—are brought into the UK and adopted without approval and without following the official adoption procedures. The Bill would be a useful measure to try to tackle the three shortcomings of the current legislative position.

If we look back over the past three decades, it is clear that the UK has played a leading role in international policy and conventions on the issue. The 1989 UN convention on the rights of the child, which covered adoption for children who could not live with their birth parents, was the product of discussions and negotiations in which the UK Government and UK non-governmental organisations played a leading part, as they did in 1993 with the Hague convention on protection of children and co-operation in respect of intercountry adoption. By March this year, 25 countries had ratified the Hague convention, six had acceded to it, which is a form of ratification, and a further 35 had signed up to it, including our Government. The Bill would put Britain back into the leading pack of countries in tackling the problem.

The admirable briefing prepared by the Library as background to the Bill contains the 1993 Hague convention and lists the signatories to it; Brazil in May 1993, Burkina Faso in April 1994, Canada in April 1994, Colombia in September 1993, Costa Rica in May 1993, Ecuador in May 1994, Finland in April 1994, Israel in November 1993, Mexico in May 1993, the Netherlands in December 1993, Romania in May 1993, the UK in January 1994, the USA in March 1994 and Uruguay in September 1993. That makes 14 countries that have signed the convention, but 66 are supposed to have ratified, signed or acceded to the convention. Therefore, 52 are unaccounted for and I would be grateful for any information that the hon. Member for Winchester or my hon. Friend the Minister could provide to help to fill the gap.

The list of countries that have signed or ratified the convention shows the scope of this international legislation. It shows the reach of the legal net that we are trying to cast across the procedures for intercountry adoptions. The number and names of those contracting countries are crucial to our understanding of how well the system that the Bill signs us up to can operate.

I envisage this system developing significantly under the provisions of the Hague convention. Each country is required by the convention to establish a central authority and accredited bodies to carry out the duties specified in the convention. Those duties are to collect, preserve and exchange information about the situation of the child and the prospective adoptive parents; to facilitate, follow and expedite proceedings with a view to obtaining the adoption; to promote the development of adoption, counselling and post-adoption services in their own states; and to provide each other with general evaluation reports about the experiences they have had with intercountry adoptions.

Contracting countries have, therefore, a duty to enforce the system in their own state, to co-operate with other states to make the system work across country boundaries, and to exchange detailed information to make it work. When we put those duties together, we begin to see the evolution of a system in which similar standards are set across different countries, and in which best practice is exchanged, information is swapped, and relationships and confidences are established between states and between authorities carrying out these duties. I believe that that

[Mr. Healey]

will lead to a bedding down and spreading of international values that are embodied in the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and in the Hague convention.

As Martin Luther King said, morality cannot be legislated for, but behaviour can be regulated. By setting standards of behaviour and good practice, we can influence social values and help to establish moral values that guide us on what is and what is not acceptable.

Let us hope that the Bill is this country's step towards stamping out the practice in which children are carted from country to country in an international bazaar of children. The demand in developed, affluent, stable countries is met by supply from unstable, poverty-stricken states. The testimony that we heard from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) bore that out vividly.

Some freelance agencies are driven by the parental demand to adopt a child irrespective of the source. They are responsible for the trafficking of children, such as occurred when the Ceausescu regime in Romania collapsed in 1990. The European Children's Trust has evidence of child smuggling. A ring was established in the 1990s. Mothers from Romania, Albania, Yugoslavia and other countries were brought to Budapest for the birth of their children, who were sold by that cartel mainly to parents in the United States. Difficulties arose over the national identities of children who were born in Hungary, but whose mothers hailed from neighbouring countries.

I want the Bill to provide legal confirmation that this country condemns, and wishes to constrain, such trade, and will impose criminal penalties. It is essential to bear in mind the potential impact on children of adoptions that are illegal, or result from informal or irregular procedures. That is underlined by the European Children's Trust, which has considerable experience in this regard, and which argues:

"The child's right to identity can disappear if information of its origins (ethnic origin, medical history, knowledge of its birth parents) is lost, as often happens in illegal adoption."

The trust reminds us that

"Children brought into a country illegally can find themselves in a limbo: where they have lost their original nationality but failed to gain a new one—and so are stateless."

It also reminds us that children who are ill or have other difficulties may, having been transported for adoption, be rejected and committed to institutions in a new country with which they have no former connection.

As today's speeches have proved, this is an emotive subject. We are talking about children whose circumstances may be desperate and tragic, and about potential adoptive parents who may have a genuine humanitarian desire to find a home for those children or who may be driven by a desperate longing to look after a child, perhaps because they cannot bear one themselves. All who are involved in the debate, both in the House and outside, have a responsibility not to overstate the arguments—and especially not to over-simplify the complex issues involved, relating to the welfare of children, the suitability of parents and the moral judgments that must be made.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I have been absent from the Chamber checking my words with *Hansard*. In the light of the hon. Gentleman's statement that we should not over-simplify the remarks of others, will he withdraw the remarks that he made about me in my absence?

Mr. Healey: No, I will let them stand. I commented on remarks that the hon. Gentleman made. I shall certainly study them in *Hansard* on Monday as, doubtless, will he, but the import was clear: that there might be circumstances in which children could be adopted from outside this country by people who were not considered suitable or adequate adoptive parents in this country. If the hon. Gentleman sits down and studies *Hansard* with me next week, he may well find that his remarks—confused though they may have been at the time, and perhaps corrected subsequently during his visit to the *Hansard* office—

Mr. St. Aubyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to traduce another by deliberately misinterpreting his statements, and making allusions to his actions that are totally unfounded?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Of course it is not in order, but that is a matter for debate, not a matter for the Chair—and I have not heard anyone traduce anyone this morning.

Mr. Healey: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me return to the briefings prepared by the European Children's Trust, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) helpfully drew our attention. I feel that, even if we allow for the fact that outside organisations must sometimes simplify their briefings for the benefit of Members of Parliament, one or two of the trust's arguments have been boiled down to the extent that they are close to being misleading. I am thinking in particular of the four "good reasons" for supporting the Bill referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East.

Reason one is

"to improve the adoption process".

That is straightforward and simply put. Reason four is

"to give more children greater protection".

Again, that is slightly simplified, but fairly straightforward. However, reason three for supporting the Bill, the trust suggests, is

"to give more children a real chance of a real home".

It says:

"Ratifying the 1993 Hague Convention will enable people from the UK to adopt from abroad with less red tape."

We are all against red tape. As I understand it, the Bill will avoid a duplicate system of adoption orders. It will also mean that the immigration clearance process will not be separate from the adoption process—a problem that was faced by a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor). However, that must be balanced with sufficient safeguards, standards within the process and clear guidelines. Calling that red tape, standards or guidelines is a matter of choice, but I would not want anyone to have the impression that the Bill sweeps away the detail of a system, some of which is essential.

According to the trust, the fourth good reason to support the Bill is

"to stop child smuggling rings".

The trust maintains that the Bill will

"put an end to these exploitative rings as well as unethical agencies interested only in profit and not children's welfare."

My reading of the Bill is that it will make it more difficult for such operations to continue. It will introduce criminal sanctions and discourage people from using such informal channels. It will set up a system that is clearer for prospective adoptive parents to follow. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) painted a vivid picture of the position. Last night, she logged on to the internet and found more than 100 private agencies offering lists of children for adoption. The Bill may go some way towards helping to clamp down on those activities, certainly in this country and in those states that sign the Hague convention, but it cannot be said that it will end those exploitative rings; to say that is misleading.

The Bill will bring intercountry adoption into the mainstream of our domestic adoption procedures. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton put it well when he said that intracountry and intercountry adoptions are two arms of the same system. The Bill underlines and puts into practice that precise point.

The Bill's aim should be to set standards and safeguards to ensure that proper rights and protection are afforded children, from whatever country they come, in adoption. I am wary that the Bill should not encourage greater intercountry adoption, a point that was put a couple of times, I think, by the hon. Member for Winchester.

Mr. Oaten: The point that I was trying to make was that, in the initial contact between a couple who may want to adopt children from another country and social services departments, the response from those departments should be positive and encouraging. They should enter into dialogue about the matter, rather than give a negative response.

Mr. Healey: I am grateful for that clarification. I entirely agree with that comment. Anyone who wishes in good faith to become an adoptive parent should be met with a positive and supportive response. The system should be fair as well as rigorous. If the overall impact of the Bill, and the aspiration of the hon. Gentleman, is to promote a greater flow of intercountry adoptions, I will be wary, but I take his clarification to mean something different, so I am grateful.

The balance is well struck. It is clearly put in the Hague convention, which is reprinted as schedule 1. The convention's preamble—it could not be clearer or more prominent—states:

"each State should take, as a matter of priority, appropriate measures to enable the child to remain in the care of his or her family of origin".

It goes on to say that

"intercountry adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her State of origin".

In other words, intercountry adoption should be very much the option of last resort.

I should like to flag up for the hon. Member for Winchester, and perhaps for my hon. Friend the Minister, three issues that clearly will be part and parcel of the regulation that will flow from the Bill and that will be an important part of implementing the Bill's measures. The first is on the nature of the central authority and accredited bodies.

Article 6 of the Hague convention spells out the fact that states should designate central authorities. Article 9 states that central authorities in each state shall perform various duties either

"directly or through public authorities or other bodies duly accredited in their State".

Under the provisions of either the Bill or the convention, will it be possible for that central authority or those accredited bodies to be non-governmental organisations, or must they be public, state agencies?

Paragraph 2 of article 6 makes it quite clear that England, Wales, Scotland and, potentially, Northern Ireland may have their own central authority for overseeing the intercountry adoption system. However, as I interpret the article, the United Kingdom will be required to designate one authority as the central authority. I should like to have confirmation from the Minister of which body will be the United Kingdom central authority, and particularly to know whether the Department of Health, in Whitehall, will play that role.

Mr. Duncan: The hon. Gentleman is clearly straying into matters that—I think in most people's view—are best suited to consideration in Committee. This has been an excellent debate, in which we have established that there are no differences between the two sides of the House on the Bill's main principles. Will the hon. Gentleman not now see fit to allow the debate to move on—or does he wish not only to delay this Bill, but to destroy proper debate on the next one?

Mr. Healey: I have no desire to delay this Bill. I wish only to address some of the important issues that the House should consider, and think that this debate is the appropriate time to do that—particularly as markers laid down in debates on Second Reading are often picked up in Committee.

The second issue is on accredited bodies, which article 11 clearly states shall

"pursue only non-profit objectives according to such conditions and within such limits as may be established by the competent authorities of the State of accreditation".

I simply seek assurance that the phrase

"within such limits as may be established"

will not become, and cannot become, a loophole through which a profit element may be introduced into operation of the agencies and bodies involved in the system.

Thirdly, as I said, the Bill contains strong encouragement, and a duty, to exchange information between authorities and states to underpin operation of the intercountry adoption system. I simply wish to encourage the hon. Member for Winchester to pursue that point, and to encourage my hon. Friend the Minister to agree that the more use we make of electronic media, the greater will be the acceleration of information exchange, the development of relations and the swapping of good practice. I should like the fullest possible use of electronic media in the communication between states and authorities of the information that is required to be communicated under article 13: the designation of the authorities, the extent of their functions and the names and addresses of accredited bodies.

[Mr. Healey]

This is a classic private Member's Bill. It is practical and non-partisan, as the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton has just reminded me. Above all, I am glad to say, it has Government backing. I repeat my congratulations to the hon. Member for Winchester and confirm my support for his aspirations.

12.41 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I often feel that the computer that is used for the ballot for private Members' Bills and for questions has a deep-seated bias against Members from Harrow, West. I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on his good fortune.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The ballot for private Members' Bills is conducted by me. There is no computer involved.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful for that clarification.

The hon. Member for Winchester has done the House a service by the way in which he introduced the Bill, the all-party support that he has drawn together and the effective way in which he has liaised with the Department of Health. He has given Parliament the opportunity to support a small, but vital, child protection measure.

My only query about what the hon. Gentleman has said lies in his highlighting of the frustration of several couples to whom he had spoken about their dealings with social work professionals. I do not know the cases to which he referred and I would be the last to support bad practice—it is right that we should champion high standards—but I hope that he agrees with the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), who made it clear in his helpful comments that adoption issues were complex. They are not easy for any of the professionals involved. I hope that he is wary of supporting those, particularly some elements in the media, who seek to traduce the social care profession at every turn. I am sure that that was not his intention, but we need to be cautious.

The Bill offers protection to the relatively small number of children who are adopted from overseas. I understand that there are 400 such adoptions on average every year. Of those, 300 are through the approved channels, but, sadly, 100 are not. A Bill to update adoption legislation is clearly overdue. The current key legislation is the Adoption Act 1976 and the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978, which were passed more than 20 years ago.

The number of people adopting from overseas is increasing. The Bill has certainly not been the victim of a lack of consultation. The parents of the Bill, for want of a better term, are the 1993 United Nations Hague convention on intercountry adoption—which was underpinned by the 1989 United Nations convention on the rights of the child—and the discussion papers published by the previous Government between 1990 and 1992 on intercountry adoption and wider international issues. That led to the comprehensive consultation document and Bill introduced in 1996 by the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley). She did not have a particularly distinguished record at the Department of Health, but she deserves credit for introducing that consultation document and Bill. Sadly, the Bill did not complete its passage through the House because of time constraints, but it received wide support from professionals in the field and from the judiciary.

As other hon. Members have highlighted, one important—albeit secondary—dimension of the Bill is that it allows Parliament to fulfil an international obligation by giving effect to the 1993 Hague convention. Several other countries have been much quicker off the mark in passing the convention into law and, as Britain was a key player in drafting the convention, it is important that we take the opportunity to incorporate it in our law.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins) and others have correctly highlighted the appalling television images of war orphans in Bosnia that we all remember—indeed, we now see pictures of war orphans in Kosovo. There were appalling news stories from orphanages and care homes in Romania when the Ceausescu regime was coming to an end. Such stories bring out the humanitarian instinct in all of us: when we hear of, or see, a child abandoned or relinquished by his or her birth parents for whatever reason, or whose birth parents have died, the natural feeling of all of us is that we want to help that child to find a family. However, my hon. Friend pointed out that we should be cautious about such natural instincts, and that the solution to the problems of poverty and war lies in the work being done by my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development. They are trying to secure long-term debt relief and sustainable development and long-term increases in the capacity and infrastructure of the health and social care systems in countries affected by those problems.

The 1989 United Nations convention on the rights of the child recognises the importance of family life for children. That convention and the 1993 Hague convention on intercountry adoption recognise that such adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child when a suitable family cannot be found in the child's state of origin. It must be right that intercountry adoption is the last resort, but it must also be right to allow a child the right to be adopted by a family living overseas, if that is the only realistic alternative to a childhood spent in institutional care.

We must first ensure, however, that a child cannot be appropriately adopted in his or her own country. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) did the House a service when he highlighted the letter from Catherine Stevens of the Romanian Orphanage Fund in response to the case of Edita Keranovic. Catherine Stevens points out the considerable success of the Romanian Orphanage Trust in removing more than 3,000 children from orphanages and returning them to family life. That was done wholly within the framework of domestic Romanian law; indeed, 80 per cent. of those children returned to their original family or to their extended family.

Adoption in any case, and especially adoption by an overseas family, often requires considerable adjustment, on the part of both the child and the adoptive family. We must ensure that the adoptive family is itself capable of adapting, and that it can help the adopted child to adapt effectively to a new life away from his or her own country, from family and friends and from familiar settings. Perhaps that child will have to use a different

language and adapt to a different culture in a completely new environment. In that respect, the Bill is clearly welcome.

There are many examples of highly dedicated and altruistic people with the most noble motives who offer the opportunity of a new life and family to children—who are perhaps the victims of appalling tragedies.

As other hon. Members have rightly said, there have been well-publicised cases in which adoptions of children from overseas have been contested further down the line. It is right that every avenue for adoption by the existing extended family, or by another family from the same state of origin, should be explored and exhausted before intercountry adoption is accepted; the case of Edita Keranovic sounds a warning note in that respect. It is entirely sensible that new rules for intercountry adoption that protect both the rights of the child and the position of the adopting family are now introduced to regulate that process.

It is not surprising that there can be friction between those who have to investigate a family for suitability to adopt and the couple themselves. The hon. Member for Winchester was right to say that the Bill would help to ensure that clear minimum standards for that process were set throughout the country. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) highlighted the figures from the House of Commons Library research paper on the number of countries that have signed, ratified and acceded to the convention. I echo the question that he asked of the Minister and the hon. Member for Winchester: what action is being taken to persuade other signatories of the 1993 convention, and countries that might accede to it, to speed up their endorsement?

My understanding of the current procedure for intercountry adoption is that approval of adopters' suitability is undertaken by the local authority social services department, or some other approved adoption agency, and that a successful application is then forwarded to the Department of Health for certification, so that it can be passed on to the relevant authority in the child's state of origin. Several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Winchester and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), have spoken of the variety of practices and standards throughout the country, and of the Bill's importance in helping to clarify some of those standards. The duty that the Bill would impose on local authorities to include intercountry adoption within their adoption services is clearly sensible and a key clarification.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport did the House a great service in raising the issue of child trafficking and the enormous number of agencies that offer help with adoption and try to make money from doing so. The new criminal offence of non-compliance with regulations resulting from the Bill is clearly welcome, as it will help to ensure that the practice of statutory and non-statutory agencies is in line with the legislation.

The key to convincing people inside and outside the House who may have doubts about the Bill lies in the comments of Felicity Collier, of the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering. She says:

"We warmly welcome this . . . Bill, which, if it became law, would provide much needed protection for children adopted from overseas. It is a matter of urgency that the UK ratify the Hague Convention . . . which it signed in 1994. This will enable us to work towards a position where all intercountry adoptions are made through government approved agencies and children are only adopted by families from outside their country of origin when it is clear that they cannot be placed with a family in their own country."

The hon. Member for Winchester has done the House a service in the way in which he introduced his Bill and made the case for it. I warmly welcome the Bill and wish it a smooth passage through Committee.

12.54 pm

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): In the course of the debate, two conventions appear to have emerged. The first, with which I happily associate myself, is warmly to congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on his success in the private Members' ballot. I should say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that ballot was conducted excellently, expeditiously and to the highest standards of the House.

The second convention—new to me—is the necessity of hon. Members apologising for not being social workers. I hold no brief for social workers: the majority of them are excellent, hard-working and perhaps underpaid people. I suspect that some of them read *The Guardian*, but the less said about them, the better. However, one consistent feature of the profession is that social workers are always blamed if they act, and blamed if they do not act. Importantly, the Bill strikes precisely the right balance between what was described as "red tape" and standards and regulations.

We have heard some excellent contributions this morning. I congratulate particularly the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on an extraordinarily wide-ranging and detailed speech, which was refreshed by his personal experiences. On a similar note, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) once again bestowed on the House the benefit of his wide-ranging life experiences. I understand that the *Donegal Democrat*—the newspaper from his homeland—features a regular round-up of speeches by my hon. Friend, who has developed a reputation for sweetness, lightness of touch, gentleness and generosity of spirit. I am sure that his speeches will continue to be read with approval by subscribers to the *Donegal Democrat*.

However, I must counsel hon. Members against researching their family trees. I offer the good example of the Rev. Sydney Smith who, when asked whether he had an idea of his family origins, replied, "Grandfather disappeared at the time of the Assizes; we asked no questions." In my case, one of my grandparents—who is mentioned in hushed tones in the family—was identified as, sadly, having once been the Conservative mayor of Bognor Regis. His name is never spoken.

On the substance of the Bill, it may be said that a Bill of this importance that legislates for such a small number of people—possibly only 300 per annum—is not the best use of parliamentary time. I think it is the very best use of parliamentary time. It is in the best traditions of the House that right hon. and hon. Members should concentrate so much time and effort on not only resolving an anomaly, but adding to the sum total of human happiness. It is all the better that we are concentrating our minds and efforts on a measure that applies to only a small number of people.

In discussing legislation, one describes not only what it is, but what it is not. A theme that has run consistently through today's debate is the utter abhorrence of the

[Mr. Stephen Pound]

system of "pick a blue-eyed baby" or tourist adoption. The Bill has nothing to do with that and, to its credit, supports the alternatives.

The excellent briefing from the Library contains one of those chilling expressions that one must re-read to ensure that one has understood it. It refers to "sender" nations. The tradition arose in some countries—typically Korea—of addressing child poverty and deprivation by exporting those problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) pointed out correctly that the problem of unwanted children would be solved only when the social infrastructures of such countries addressed those issues. Exporting children, and becoming known and defined as a "sender" country, is no way of addressing that problem or of even beginning to meet the needs of individual children. I repeat my praise of the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South and his comments on that subject.

This matter is not about choosing babies as the latest designer accessory or even about responding—perhaps understandably—to the intensely high emotion of a particular world crisis, be it Guatemalan street children or Kosovan refugees. It is about recognising that, in today's world, where communications systems are so widespread and so much faster and where family structures are changing and people are moving across the planet, anomalies will always occur. There will always be a need to adopt children who are not, but who are as close as, blood relatives. I can think of an Iranian family in my constituency who sought to adopt a child who had been brought up as part of their household, but was not a blood relative. When all the child's relatives died or disappeared and he was left alone in the world, it was utterly natural for him to turn to the family whom he knew best.

We cannot legislate for all the circumstances that will arise in a constantly shifting and changing world, but the hon. Member for Winchester has made an excellent job of producing a Bill that provides the basis for a far better, saner and more sensible way of operating.

We are dealing with individuals. We have heard that intercountry and intracountry adoptions may not be successful, but that is because of the nature of the individuals. To realise that, one has only to consider cases of famous people such as the Fashanu brothers. They came from the same background and were adopted and brought up in similar circumstances. One ended a tragic, lonely life with death at his own hand in a garage in the east end of London; the other is successful. At the end of the day, it is the individuals who count. The hon. Member for Winchester has recognised the importance of the family and of the individual.

I pay particular credit to the hon. Gentleman for clauses 3 to 8, which are important because they will amend the British Nationality Act 1981 to enable children adopted overseas under the convention to receive British citizenship automatically under certain conditions. As my colleagues have eloquently pointed out, the problem of dealing with entry clearance has often made impossible the logical pursuit of an adoption through what an hon. Member earlier described as the quagmire of the process. The problems attendant on adopting children and then having to deal with their nationality often put unacceptable strains on the family relationship and the children. I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester on correctly identifying the need to amend the British Nationality Act so that those children can eventually receive British citizenship.

Felicity Collier, the director of the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, has been quoted extensively, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas). The Library briefing contains a statement also from Gill Haworth, the chief executive of the overseas adoption helpline. One sentence in that statement should be shared with the House. Referring to prospective adopters who want a more regulated system, she says:

> "They also want to know that the child who will eventually become a full member of their family truly needs them as parents—having been abandoned or fully relinquished for adoption. They do not wish to risk that they and the child have come together for life as a result of child trafficking or other irregularities which may, in time, threaten their security as a family."

The Bill is small and non-contentious, but it covers a vast range of human activity.

Mr. McNulty: I thank my hon. Friend for his earlier, perhaps scurrilous, description of me. Does he agree that the only discordant note that has been sounded today is the notion that there should be a two-tier aspect to the home adoption and intercountry adoption systems? One of the Bill's strengths is that it eschews that notion and states that the same model and framework should be used for adoption at home as for intercountry adoption. That discordant note should be dismissed.

Mr. Pound: I entirely concur with my hon. Friend, although I did not hear that discordant note. The assumption, even the suggestion, that there might be a duality or double standard is contemptible and unworthy of the House. I regret that such a statement was made, if it was—I cannot confirm that fact.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am sure that I speak for all Conservative Members in agreeing with the hon. Gentleman. None of us heard a discordant note. It must have sounded in the imagination of the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty).

Mr. Pound: I did not hear it because I was not in the Chamber when the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) spoke.

In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East, let me say that northern countries should not affect superiority by adopting—le mot juste—a different standard in respect of Guatemalan street children. For us in the west to feel that we are doing so extraordinary a favour that the ordinary standards of decency that apply to fostering and adoption in our country should not apply is unacceptable. No hon. Member would make such an assertion. Anyone with half an ounce of wit or sense would regard that attitude as indefensible. It is even a pre-imperialist attitude.

I remarked on the breadth of the Bill. Its introduction of sanctions to deal with unacceptable practices in intercountry adoptions must not be underestimated. We all know of dramatic cases, some of which were mentioned today. The introduction of sanctions and a proper legal framework and the fact that we can move towards global ratification of the 1993 Hague convention are all measures that, when united, will be of great service to children and adopting families, but not to the criminal

and semi-criminal gangs of thugs who leech off human misery and squeeze profit from it. They will not thank the hon. Member for Winchester for introducing the Bill, but any decent-minded person will. I am happy to associate myself with it.

The Bill has the support of both sides of the House. That not only does credit to the skills of the hon. Member for Winchester and those who drew it up, but is a recognition of the fact that children have rights. Until recently, children were perceived as the property or chattels of parents. The fact that they now have rights through the United Nations structure and under legislation is so ground breaking that we sometimes need to be reminded of it. Ultimately, the Bill is not so much about adoptive parents or the country from which the child comes as about the child. What we do here today will materially improve the conditions not only of children seeking adoption now, but of those who seek it in future.

I am told that many hon. Members pass their time in the House without achieving great things. I do not know whether that is true because hon. Members achieve things in different ways. In advancing the Bill, the hon. Member for Winchester may not change the course of the nation's history, but he will change the lives of many children and adoptive parents, and that is admirable. I congratulate him on that and hope that the Bill will receive the full support that it deserves.

1.9 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on doing well enough in the ballot to introduce the Bill. Having heard my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) and for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) comment on the process of balloting for private Members' Bills, I say only that my number has yet to come up.

I welcome the Bill. We should remember that not many children will be affected. Every year, about 300 children come to the United Kingdom legally for adoption, and it is estimated that about 100 are brought here illegally. The Bill is primarily aimed at the latter, although I very much welcome the fact that the 1993 Hague convention is to be introduced into our law, better to regulate the legitimate process for intercountry adoption.

The Bill introduces a proper legal framework for intercountry adoption. It enables the UK to give effect to the Hague convention and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North graphically described, introduces sanctions to tackle unacceptable practices in intercountry adoption. I shall discuss that later.

Last night, I got home in time to catch the end of the Chelsea match—about which the less said, the better—but, immediately afterwards, there was the 10 o'clock news on the BBC. As has so often been the case in recent weeks, the lead story was about the crisis in Kosovo. I cannot be the only one who saw the report of the boy, a refugee from Kosovo aged about 13 or 14, who graphically told of his experience. He told how, when the Serb troops arrived, he had been playing at a friend's home. He managed to get out and hid in a dustbin overnight, emerging next morning to find the village deserted. His family had been forced to leave without him. Somehow, he made his way to Albania, where the Albanian authorities accommodated him in a sports centre, with many other destitute children.

That was a tragic story, and it is not the only tragic story to come out of this war for children, for disunited families and for the many others who have suffered at the hands of the Serbian authorities.

In such circumstances, there is often a great ground swell of feeling that we must do something for those children. This morning, on Radio 4, I heard debates about how many refugees should be accepted into the United Kingdom. The next stage is that families start to wonder what they might do personally to help, and it is a natural reaction to wonder whether one might adopt one of those children. That is not necessarily the right reaction.

Last night, when I was preparing for the debate, I saw in the Library brief a quotation from a leaflet published by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering. Its counsel in that leaflet is very important, and bears relaying to the House. It said:

"There are various circumstances which may lead people to consider adopting children from overseas and some typical examples have been given already."

I gave a graphic example earlier.

"There are also other situations, for example, war or famine or poverty, which may lead people to believe that adopting children affected by disasters will be the right solution but this may not always be the case."

It then speaks of war and emergencies such as that in Kosovo, which we now see on our TV screens, read about in newspapers and hear about on the radio.

Mr. McNulty: Does my hon. Friend agree that the essence of the Bill is not to attack or impugn the motives of those who want to adopt a child from overseas but only, as other hon. Members have said, to put the interests and needs of the child first and foremost? As the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) said, intercountry adoption should be the exception, not the rule; but the Bill will smooth the path for those who do want to adopt.

Mr. Dismore: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. I hope to develop some of the themes that he outlined later, if there is time. The key point that my hon. Friend makes is the primacy of the interests of the child and the feelings of the prospective adoptive family. Throughout our legislation relating to the protection of children, and in our family law, the children's interests always come first.

I am sure that my hon. Friend shares my experience when dealing with cases involving children in the surgery. We meet the parent whose child has been taken away, or the grandparents seeking access to the child who has been placed in temporary care or with a foster family. Not unnaturally, they sometimes think that their feelings come before those of the child. It may be difficult for us in our surgeries to represent the interests of the child when discussing the position with the parents, grandparents or the rest of the family.

The point that I was developing when my hon. Friend made his helpful intervention was that, in the United Kingdom, there are many well-meaning people who want to do all that they can to help the refugees whom they see nightly on their television screens. Not only do people make donations, but now there is a debate on the extent to which we should take refugees—

Ms Coffey: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the tragedies of the situation in Kosovo, which has touched

[Ms Coffey]

all of us, is the parents desperately seeking their children and distressed children who have lost their parents, whom we see so often on television? Is not one of the most important contributions that we can make to ensure that aid agencies are given the resources to enable parents who are seeking children to find them, and to put children in touch with their parents, re-uniting families? If we do not make that effort in the immediate future, two or three years down the line, children who are not orphans, but who have been lost, will be designated orphans. The greatest contribution that we can make is to re-unite those children with their families.

Mr. Dismore: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention, which is the mirror image of the story of the young boy whom I described. Somewhere, in one of the refugee camps in Albania or Macedonia—or perhaps the family has moved out of the region to one of the countries that are taking refugees—there will be a distraught family, terrified of what has happened to that child. His relatives will not know that he hid in a dustbin overnight. For all they know, he was murdered by the Serbs. I only hope that, somehow, they may have been able to see the television pictures that we all saw last night. Perhaps that may help to re-unite that family.

One of the worst things that the Serbs have been doing is not just the ethnic cleansing—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It was perfectly in order to make an illustrative point, but not to develop it.

Mr. Dismore: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I return to the main focus of my remarks—the comments of the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering in the Library briefing on the Bill. BAAF state that in situations

"such as war or famine, families may be desperate to ensure their child's survival and will even consider placing a child with another family permanently."

It refers to the large movements of children during the Vietnam war and more recently in Bosnia, and the same is now true of Kosovo. BAAF continues:

"One of the biggest problems with emergency situations is that there is rarely any systematic approach to placing children. They may be moved between families, sometimes in an extremely haphazard way, with very little record-keeping or documentation about where they came from or where they are eventually placed."

That is illustrated by the present situation. One of the things that the Serbs have been doing to all refugees is stripping them of their documentation. They have been doing so to make it that much harder for the refugees to prove that they had homes in Kosovo and citizenship there. A by-product of the Serbs' actions is that that will make it that much harder for the families of refugees to be re-united or to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman heard what I said.

Mr. Dismore: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Bill deals with the need for proper documentation.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: My hon. Friend is right to mention the need for proper documentation. Is he aware that a number of lawyers have been using privately commissioned home-study assessments to get round the current legal position? Does he agree that one of the Bill's positive aspects is that it will close that loophole and lock in local authority social services departments, or other agencies approved by the Secretary of State, as the only route for legitimate intercountry adoptions?

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. The Hague convention specifically refers to the need for proper documentation when children are put forward for intercountry adoption and for proper written consent from the parents. It also refers to the need, if the children are old enough, for proper consent to be given by them in writing.

Before you brought me to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was trying to make the point that the absence of documentation to prove identity and rebuild links in the terrible situations that give rise to circumstances in which people wish to enter into intercountry adoptions is yet another handicap for those who want to deal with those problems and initiate an adoption, if that is legitimate.

The BAAF goes on to record the efforts of the Red Cross to set up proper recording systems, which have been developed from experience in previous wars, and refers to the serious long-term consequences of moving people about. In that context, it specifically says that it is sometimes impossible to gather the information needed to decide whether a child is available for adoption. For example, and to follow up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey), are the child's parents alive? If so, would they agree to the plan? Are there any birth relatives who could care for the child?

For those reasons, intercountry adoption is not a suitable way to deal with the needs of children who are moved about as a result of war. I was trying to develop that point—perhaps a little too extensively—in the context of the Bill when you called me to order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A child's parents have to be traced, if they possibly can be and if they are alive, to give their consent to the adoption. However, it is likely that they would want the child to be returned to them.

Ms Coffey: Does my hon. Friend agree that an important aspect of the implementation of the Hague convention in countries of origin is ensuring that their procedures establish that the child is adoptable? Far too often, we hear stories of children being snatched and offered up for adoption. They are not adoptable, but have been taken from their parents because they are considered to be a marketable commodity. Having the Hague convention ratified in countries of origin is as important as receiving countries such as the United Kingdom implementing it so that the procedures for adopting children—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has already spoken once in the debate and cannot make a second speech. Only brief interventions are allowed.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We have to look at not only the receiving country—that is what we are debating in respect of our role in the Hague convention and the Bill—but the position in the country of origin. The valid question of the Yugoslav citizenship

of the children involved in the Kosovo crisis, and what attitude the Belgrade Government would take towards them, has been mentioned. There is no easy answer to that question.

The position could be reversed, as children from the United Kingdom may be wanted for adoption by people from overseas, and the Library briefing refers to the example of overseas service men. An American service man serving on one of the air force bases in East Anglia may marry a local woman with children from a previous marriage and want to adopt them before moving overseas.

Valerie Davey: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as a result of the Hague convention and the Bill, we have introduced a new phrase—a convention adoption? A convention adoption will allow a greater understanding of reciprocal terms and conditions in all countries. My hon. Friend is right to say that it will allow adoption from this country to another country in certain circumstances, under the same rigorous terms and conditions. The great advantage of the convention and the Bill will be that the position will be clarified. The debate that we are having will take place around the world and, as a result, all those countries who ratify the convention will have a greater understanding of the details of the issue.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes a telling point about the need to see the Bill in the context of what is happening worldwide. The Library research paper lists those countries that have already signed up to the convention, including Brazil in May 1993, Burkina Faso in April 1994, Canada in April 1994, Colombia in September 1993, Costa Rica in May 1993, Ecuador in May 1994, Finland in April 1994, Israel in November 1993, Mexico in May 1993—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was here for the whole of the debate, but I am hearing something that I have heard before and it is unnecessary repetition.

Mr. Dismore: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was here for the start of the debate and heard the hon. Member for Winchester introduce the Bill. I was also here for some of the earlier speeches by my hon. Friends, but I did not hear the full debate.

My hon. Friends the Members for Stockport and for Ealing, North mentioned the need for criminal sanctions. In my other profession as a personal injury lawyer, I was often accused of ambulance chasing. I found that an unjustified allegation because I tried to conduct myself in a proper and professional way. However, there are bad eggs in that profession, as in any other, and my hon. Friends highlighted the problem of bad eggs who are involved in adoption. Many of the agencies are legitimate, worthwhile and understanding bodies which do the job properly. However, there are many sites on the internet that are effectively businesses, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport mentioned. We must look to protect children and not see them simply as a commodity for international trade.

1.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): This has been a high-quality debate and we have heard some impressive and well-informed contributions from both sides of the House. I draw significant comfort from the fact that, when the House debates issues of child welfare—am grateful to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) for giving us the opportunity to do so today—we see strong cross-party support for the welfare of children. I hope that it will always be the case, in the House and in the country, that we can all unite in pursuing that agenda. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer rightly said, when he introduced the Budget in March, children account for only 20 per cent. of our population but they are 100 per cent. of our future. That is true and applies just as much to children who come to this country from overseas and are adopted by British citizens as it does to any other child in this country. It is important that the House can unite around a common agenda to promote the long-term welfare and best interests of children.

Several significant speeches have been made and many detailed and technical questions have been raised by hon. Members., I wish to respond as fully as I can to all those questions, because it would be discourteous not to do so. The hon. Member for Winchester was right to emphasise that the Bill does not create new obstacles to intercountry adoption. It provides better protection for children in those circumstances, and it establishes a clear and effective legal foundation for intercountry adoptions. It allows the United Kingdom fully to meet its international obligations, and in so doing to co-operate in international child protection and child welfare measures. It is important that this country takes that leading responsibility.

I am particularly grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words about officials in the Department of Health. Some of them are present, but I shall ensure that all the officials who have supported the hon. Gentleman are aware of his kind words. I shall return in more detail to some of the points that he raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), who unfortunately is not in his place, made a good speech, and he raised a number of technical issues, some of which were taken up by other hon. Members, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) and the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock).

Most of the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe related to the welfare of children subject to intercountry adoptions. He also referred to cases involving a country of origin that is not a signatory to the convention, and he asked about the differences between the adoption order procedures in a convention country and those in a non-convention country. He also raised the issue of the former Yugoslavia and the wider issue of what happens when a country is at war or when civil hostilities or other extreme civil emergencies are taking place. He asked what steps should this country and other convention countries take to ensure that, when those special circumstances prevail in the country of origin, the strictest standards for intercountry adoptions are applied.

My hon. Friend asked what provisions in the Bill and the convention would fundamentally guarantee the welfare of children. That point was also raised by other hon. Members. I draw the House's attention to article 4 of the convention. Under the convention, a child's country should ensure that the child cannot be looked after in his own country before it considers an intercountry adoption. Article 4 requires the child's country of origin to establish

[Mr. John Hutton]

that the child is adoptable, and to determine, after possibilities for placement of the child within the state of origin have been given due consideration, whether an intercountry adoption is in the child's best interests. The article identifies other steps that the country of origin is required to take. It must ensure that consents have been given freely and have not been induced by payment or compensation, and that the consent of the mother, when required, has been given only after the birth of the child, so that there is no suggestion of unfair or inappropriate pressure.

The issue of what happens in a war zone or where there are hostilities is a grey area: it is a complex area of international law. The view has been that treaties that require a state of peace are suspended at the time of hostilities or war, although there is no clear international law on that point. That does not apply to treaties such as the Geneva convention, which are designed specifically to apply in times of war.

The Vienna convention, which deals with treaties generally and lays down the international framework of law for their application, does not directly address the problem in detail. After hostilities cease, it may not be feasible, practical, appropriate or even desirable for the application of the treaty to be resumed immediately. It would depend on the terms of the treaty. The hon. Member for Winchester referred to a two-year suspension of international treaties. I am aware that some states have taken that view, but this is a difficult area, because international law is not absolutely clear. I shall say more about that shortly, but, in general, I think that such cases emphasise the need for the strictest possible standards. Several speakers, mainly Labour Members, have mentioned the issue, which has arisen in a number of contexts today. Most speakers have stressed the need for the highest standards in assessment of both the suitability of an adoption in the first place, and the suitability of the prospective adopters. That applies to intercountry as well as intracountry adoptions, including adoptions at times of civil emergency and hostilities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe referred to non-convention adoptions. The Bill makes no express mention of such adoptions, but clause 9 makes it clear that local authorities' duty to provide adoption advice and adoption services will include overseas adoptions, whether they are convention or non-convention adoptions. Section 9 of the Adoption Act 1976 gives us power to make regulations governing the way in which adoption agencies exercise their functions. We intend to make regulations governing the process relating to non-convention adoptions, which will be similar to the process relating to convention adoptions. They will require approval by local authorities of prospective adopters. Proper documentation will have to be sent to the Department of Health, which will handle intercountry aspects. There will have to be proper supervision of placements when children come to the United Kingdom, and proper reports must be made to the court in regard to adoption applications.

The Bill will make it an offence to bring a child into the United Kingdom without the prescribed requirements being met, irrespective of whether that child comes from a convention country. One of the prescribed requirements will be the approval of the Department of Health. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) referred to clause 13, and to the fact that private home study reports will be made unlawful. That, too, will apply to both convention and non-convention adoptions.

A number of speakers mentioned the situation in the former Yugoslavia—in Kosovo, and in Serbia generally. Yugoslavia is not a signatory to the Hague convention, and, because of that and because of the situation generally, any adoption would have to be subject to a full and rigorous additional procedure in the United Kingdom. Under the Bill, it will not be possible for such adoption orders to be dealt with as convention adoption orders. I hope that I have dealt adequately with some of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) made an effective and well-informed speech. I pay tribute to her work in the House and elsewhere on promoting adoption, and congratulate her on the content and tone of what she said today. She made a number of points, one of which concerned adoption statistics. We intend to consider ways in which the new performance assessment framework for personal social services, on which we are consulting widely, might be adapted to cover local authority adoption services. I will ensure that my hon. Friend is informed of any developments. We share her wish to ensure that adoption becomes a mainstream element of children's services, and we shall take the appropriate action.

I welcome the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) and acknowledge his work to promote the welfare of children. He was particularly concerned about the welfare of children overseas. I agree with the general tone of his remarks. He is not here at the moment—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes he is."] I am sorry. I do not have my glasses on. I draw his attention as well to article 4 of the Hague convention. I hope that that addresses some of his concerns.

I appreciate the support of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan)—I am sure that the hon. Member for Winchester does, too—who spoke for the Bill on behalf of the Opposition. I echo the tribute paid by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton to hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. As I have said, it has been a high-quality debate. We appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comments.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) unfortunately provoked some concern about what he intended by his remarks. I am not in a position to judge them at the moment. Obviously, he must account for them, but I hope that he agrees that, in intercountry adoption, we should not be any less rigorous, or determined to ensure the suitability of prospective adopters than in cases of adoption in this country.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am sure that we all agree with that. However, does the Minister not agree that there is widespread concern that individual local authorities perhaps provide their own criteria above and beyond what would be normally judged as suitable? Those authorities should bear it mind, in setting criteria for couples who are able to adopt, that there may be couples out there beyond

those who are required for home adoptions who may be very suitable for the particular cases referred to the debate. They should not be unnecessarily excluded.

Mr. Hutton: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman's attempt to clear up the confusion about his earlier remarks has inadvertently added to that confusion. We take seriously adoption in the UK. As I have said, we want to ensure that it is a mainstream service that is available for children who would benefit from adoption. We have already issued new statutory guidance to local authorities to ensure that that happens.

The hon. Member for Guildford specifically referred to age limits. He seemed to indicate that there was some statutory bar, or upper age limit in relation to adoption. That is not true. The legislation does not contain any statutory upper age limit for prospective adopters. The guidance that has been issued to local authorities rightly draws attention to the fact that, although there is no upper age restriction, age is one consideration among many that needs to be taken into account in assessing the suitability of prospective adopters.

Age is necessarily linked to general health, fitness and emotional well-being. Some older people may score higher in that regard than some younger ones. Therefore, under the guidance that we have issued, adoption agencies are expected to recruit adoptive parents who will have the health and vigour to meet the many and varied demands of children in their growing years and to be there for them into adulthood. I hope that, if the hon. Member for Guildford was under the impression that there was a statutory age limit, he is now reassured that there is not.

The hon. Gentleman asked what would happen if a competent court in one country did not annul an adoption and an equally competent court in another country did. We could have a problem if a court in one country, perhaps the country where the child was born, decides for some reason to rescind, or to annul the adoption order. What implications would that have in the United Kingdom?

Under the convention, proper investigation of the child's background would need to take place. Article 4 would, I hope, preclude situations arising where a child's family is not properly investigated. The circumstance that the hon. Gentleman envisaged might arise where a long-lost relative turned up after adoption has taken place; that was his concern.

We think that the procedures in the convention will make that extremely unlikely. If an adoption is made under the terms of the convention, it may be annulled on the ground of public policy—for example, under article 24, which will be implemented by clause 6.

I think that the hon. Gentleman was concerned about what would happen if the courts of two convention countries reached two different views on an adoption. Under clause 6, if an authority or another convention country annuls an adoption, we would recognise that annulment—as we should have to do under the convention. However, it would be extremely unusual for, and is extremely unlikely that, courts in two convention countries would deal with the suitability of an adoption in that way. Although I hope that a basis for his concerns will never materialise, we believe that the convention's structure, methodology and very strict requirements on assessments of suitability for adoption will make the advent of such a basis very improbable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) was certainly right to describe the Hague convention as an act of international solidarity, because it is about the safety and welfare of children. She was right also to say that the Bill will help to provide necessary clarification of the procedures that should be followed in intercountry adoptions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins) brought his own very considerable professional knowledge and insight to bear in a very impressive speech—although he started a trend for later speeches, in which other hon. Members made almost therapeutic confessions that they are or have been social workers. I do not think that any of them have anything to apologise for. Social work is an honourable and very important profession, and the Government shall certainly be taking action to improve social services and to support social workers in some of the very difficult work that they do on our behalf.

My hon. Friend stressed the need for a properly regulated process in intercountry adoptions, which is exactly what the Bill will provide. He was right also to make the point that the Bill is not about red tape—a theme that was picked up in later speeches—but about allowing the United Kingdom to implement fully the Hague convention. To echo his phrase—I cannot put it any better—the Bill is a marriage of high principle with common sense. He placed the Bill exactly in its proper context.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East spoke very movingly of his own family history, and of the circumstances in which his father and grandfather found themselves. He emphasised the strong support for the Bill—which commands universal support both inside and outside the House—and struck exactly the right balance between promoting the welfare of children and meeting the aspirations of would-be adopters.

I am very sorry that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South is not in the Chamber, but he had to deal with other commitments. In an extraordinarily effective and powerful speech, he gave us the benefit of his own considerable knowledge of intercountry adoptions, rightly pointing out not only the pitfalls, but the more positive outcomes produced by intercountry adoptions. He also rightly said that we have to be rigorous in our assessment procedures on prospective adopters. The House listened with very great interest to his remarks. I am sure, from their tone, that he will continue his efforts, perhaps in the Council of Europe, to secure advances in the welfare of children. I am glad that he so strongly supports the Bill, which he described as a shining light, in which we may all bask.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) mentioned some quite specific concerns and a specific adoption case in his own constituency. I was glad to hear that that case has now been resolved. He also raised the much wider issue of information on adoptive families, and on giving rights to relatives of those who have been adopted to identify and contact their adopted relative. Although I should be happy to meet him at any time to discuss those issues, if he thinks that that would be helpful, there are some significant risks in pursuing the path that he seemed to want us to take. It is only fair to put that on the record, but we are happy to discuss the issues with him in more detail if he would find that helpful.

[Mr. Hutton]

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) raised several issues, including the number of children involved in intercountry adoptions. I can confirm that his figures were broadly accurate. He also emphasised the importance of international action to ensure the proper protection of the welfare of children moving across national boundaries.

My hon. Friend asked about the number of countries that have signed the convention and the number that have subsequently ratified it, pointing out what he regarded as some discrepancies in the information that had been provided. As of 5 February this year, 35 nations had signed the Hague convention and 23 had ratified it. Six others had acceded to the convention, making a total of 29 countries in a position to implement it. Accession is equivalent to ratification, but only members of the Hague conference can ratify it. Non-members take the path of acceding to the convention. The Bill will allow the United Kingdom to join the list of countries that have ratified the convention. We shall all be pleased when that happens.

My hon. Friend also asked about the central authorities required under the convention. He was right to suggest that the Department of Health in England will be the central point of contact between all four home countries and the convention, but central authorities will be created in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is not a requirement of the 1993 Hague convention that the central authority should be a public body, but all the countries that have ratified it have appointed the relevant public body that already has responsibility for adoption. That is entirely appropriate and makes perfect sense.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West traced some of the recent history of adoption law and the background to the Bill. He rightly drew attention to the strong support for the Bill expressed by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering. We welcome that support, which is encouraging.

In a short but effective speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) was the only Member to draw attention to the aspects of the Bill that relate to the British Nationality Act 1981. He explained powerfully why amendments to that Act were necessary. He also rightly emphasised the need for the highest possible standards in intercountry adoption.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) drew attention to some of the particularly difficult situations that can arise where there are hostilities or other civil emergencies. I emphasise that the greatest care should be taken in such cases.

I hope that I have responded to all the points that have been raised during the debate. If there are any other outstanding issues to which hon. Members would like a response, I shall ensure that we follow them up with correspondence. I place on record my appreciation for the hon. Member for Winchester in his choice of Bill. He has done the House an enormous service, giving us an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to supporting the welfare and protection of children, and we are grateful to him.

The Government recognise the need for legislation. The Adoption Act 1976 and the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978, both of which would be amended by the Bill, were prepared at a time when very few people in the United Kingdom adopted from overseas. Such adoptions were confined mainly to the adoption of relatives. Intercountry adoption has been growing steadily in recent years, providing an option for people who cannot have children or who wish to extend their existing family. Our view is that the opportunity to adopt from overseas should continue to be facilitated.

The Bill will place intercountry adoption on a firm legal footing. Its provisions largely replicate measures contained in a comprehensive adoption Bill issued as part of a consultation document in 1996 by the previous Administration; the proposals on intercountry adoption received widespread support at that time from everyone in the sector, including professionals—such as social workers—interested organisations and the judiciary.

The Bill will enable more adoptive families to adopt children from overseas and have the adoption order automatically recognised within England, Scotland and Wales, when they adopt under the 1993 Hague convention. That means that the adoptive parents will not be required to reapply to a court for a second adoption order on their return. Also, their adopted children will enjoy the same legal status as children adopted in the UK; that will include the opportunity to have their adoption registered. Equally important, the Bill closes the door firmly on those who would seek to adopt children without going through the proper process.

I shall say more about those issues in a few moments, when I have set the Bill in its wider context. Hon. Members will be aware of the Government's "Quality Protects" programme, the objective of which is to improve all services for children, including adoption, through good-quality assessment and care planning, effective audit mechanisms and stronger management. It is a three-year programme and in this, its first year, work towards achieving those improvements is already well advanced.

In that connection, the Government have invested £375 million over the three-year period to assist local authorities to develop management action plans that identify specific projects for improvement. We are working with local authorities to bring adoption into the mainstream of children's services. We are also anxious to see a marked reduction in the time children spend in temporary care before being placed with new and permanent parents. It is no longer acceptable—if it ever was—for children to be allowed to drift in the care system.

"Quality Protects" addresses that issue and also seeks to change certain attitudes towards adoption—the subject of the Bill. For too long, adoption has been regarded as an option of last resort—to be applied only when all other alternatives have been tried and have failed. Such a view demonstrates a misconception of the value of adoption and a failure to understand its advantages for children unable to live with their own families.

Adoption must be seen as a positive option for children: that important message permeates the "Quality Protects" programme. For some children, adoption provides a fresh start, perhaps giving them their only opportunity of experiencing family life. More than 850,000 children in the United Kingdom have benefited from adoption since the first adoption legislation in 1926. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to adoptive parents, through

whose generosity and commitment so many children have come to enjoy the sense of security and well-being that may have been denied them in their younger lives.

The hon. Member for Winchester began his speech by reminding the House that a mark of our society is how we treat our children. I agree strongly with him. The Bill is essentially about children and measures to protect them. However, those children live not in the United Kingdom but overseas—sometimes in countries where there is great deprivation and poverty. Not only are many families in those countries vulnerable, but the children are even more vulnerable.

Many hon. Members referred to the 1989 UN convention on the rights of the child, which points out that

"intercountry adoption may offer the advantage of a permanent family to a child for whom a suitable family cannot be found in his or her State of origin".

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre made particular reference to that. For many, if not, children needing new families in countries working with the United Kingdom, there is no alternative to institutionalised care; adoptive families are simply not available and relatives are able to care for those children in only a small percentage of cases.

The real alternative for many abandoned children in a number of countries is a life in an institution throughout their childhood. Some children leave the institutions to live in public sewers, or on the streets, surviving by stealing or prostitution, or acting as drug couriers. The life expectancy of most of those children is estimated by UNICEF—the United Nations Children's Fund—to be about six years. Death often comes to those children as a result of a drug overdose, murder, hypothermia, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and so on. We must continue to work with our international partners to improve the situation facing those vulnerable children.

The aims of the Bill, although having to do with the adoption of children from overseas, complement the concepts behind the "Quality Protects" programme. The Bill provides two important measures to protect those children: first, by enabling the United Kingdom to give effect to the 1993 Hague convention; and, secondly, by providing sanctions against those who bring them, or arrange for them to be brought, to the UK without authority.

Because the children are to be adopted by people living in a different country, there are two sets of laws and regulations to be met: those of the child's country of origin and those of the adopter's country of residence. It was with that in mind, as well the knowledge that intercountry adoption is frequently linked to abuses against children and their families, that the Hague conference began its work on intercountry adoption in 1990. More than 80 countries, including the United Kingdom, and many non-governmental organisations took an active part in the work of the conference over a three-year period, culminating in the convention in May 1993. Hon. Members will know that, in 1991, the United Kingdom ratified the 1989 UN convention on the rights of the child, and that that convention provided the bedrock for the 1993 Hague convention.

The hon. Member for Winchester explained that the convention is a framework containing minimum standards to be applied by countries seeking to ratify it. It is not a comprehensive adoption manual, but a document upon which countries can build and so improve their own legislative measures. The United Kingdom is fortunate in that there already exists a comprehensive framework to operate the majority of the requirements set out in the articles to the convention. The Bill fills the remaining gaps and provides the opportunity for the UK to meet an important international obligation by giving effect to the convention's articles. In ratifying the convention, the Government will provide a clear signal abroad, for which the hon. Gentleman asked, that we take seriously the protection of children adopted from overseas.

The Bill amends section 1(5) of the British Nationality Act 1981, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North referred, by providing that, where a child who does not have British nationality is adopted, either in any UK court or outside the British islands, under the convention—and only under the convention—he will be able to acquire British nationality automatically. That will be subject to at least one of the adoptive parents being a British citizen at the time the adoption order is made in the foreign court; and, in the case of a convention adoption, on the adopter—or, where they are married, both adopters—being habitually resident in the UK.

Under current law, an adoption order made in a United Kingdom court automatically confers British nationality on a child who is not a British citizen where at least one of the adopters is a British citizen. Therefore, the amendment ensures that the adopted child enjoys the same status from the making of a convention adoption order as he would if the adoption were made in the UK—a requirement placed on the Government by the convention.

In doing that, the Bill implements article 26(2) of the convention, which requires a contracting state, where an adoption has the effect of terminating a pre-existing legal parent-child relationship, to ensure that:

"the child shall enjoy in the receiving State, and any other Contracting State where the adoption is recognised, rights equivalent to those resulting from adoptions having this effect in each such State".

Let me assure the House that that provision does not breach any fundamental principle of UK sovereignty. A court in another convention country is not being given authority to confer British nationality; rather, the United Kingdom is imposing an additional effect upon a convention adoption at the time the order is made. Therefore, it is the United Kingdom that determines British citizenship, not the foreign court.

I am pleased to inform the House that, since 1990, when interest in intercountry adoption began in earnest, the majority of people adopting children from overseas have done so through the proper channels, by approaching a local authority or an approved adoption agency. Since 1993, almost 1,200 applications have been processed by the Department of Health to adopt children from 42 different countries. Many adopters have written to Department of Health officials responsible for intercountry adoption expressing their thanks for the help and support that they have received. Although I do not pretend that the present system is perfect, in most cases, it works well within existing legislative constraints.

However, a not insignificant number of people, for a variety of reasons, choose not to proceed with an intercountry adoption through the proper channels. The precise figure is not known, but it is estimated from various sources that about 100 children living overseas

[Mr. Hutton]

are affected in that way each year. Not only do those people avoid procedures in the United Kingdom, but many seek the help—not without cost—of individuals or organisations overseas which themselves operate outside their own laws. It is not unknown for fraudulent documents to be used to secure an adoption order in a child's country of origin; and there are often concerns about the validity of a mother's consent to the adoption of her child, or that she has received money or other forms of reward to persuade her to relinquish her child for adoption.

Many international child welfare organisations, including UNICEF, Defence of Children International and the UN special commission on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, continually voice their concerns about trafficking in children. The drafters of the 1989 UN convention on the rights of the child were highly aware of the moral and physical dangers facing children in many countries. Regrettably, trafficking is too often linked with intercountry adoption, as it is a very lucrative source of income for the unscrupulous. Operation of the convention will eliminate such practices, as will the requirement in the Bill that every person seeking to adopt a child from overseas must be assessed by an adoption agency.

I take this opportunity to assure the House that the Bill is not about frustrating the wishes of those who want to adopt children from overseas; it is about setting out clearly and for the first time the correct procedure to be followed. Continued co-operation between the relevant competent adoption authorities in both the adopter's country and that of the child will ensure that only those children who are in genuine need of a new family are placed for adoption.

As the hon. Member for Winchester has already pointed out, the objectives of the proposed sanctions include dealing with unacceptable practices in intercountry adoption in order to deter those who would otherwise make arrangements to adopt a child and who have not been approved as suitable to become adoptive parents, those who have been assessed and found unsuitable, or who have not applied because they are aware that their application is bound to fail.

I could say much more about the Bill but, in order to ensure that the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) has an opportunity to present his Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill, it might be helpful if I confine my remaining remarks to the timetable for enacting the measures.

Once the Bill becomes law, officials in my Department will prepare consequent regulations and guidance to local authorities, adoption agencies and other interested groups. I assure the House that we shall consult widely on the contents of those regulations. It is also envisaged that a series of training seminars will be arranged to inform adoption agency staff about the legislation and their part in making the new provisions work effectively. The Department's "Guide to Intercountry Adoption" will also be brought up to date and presented in a form that will facilitate its use by social workers as a reference book in their intercountry work. I hope that the work will be completed within a year of the Bill's enactment and that implementation will occur in summer 2000. The instrument of ratification will be delivered to the Permanent Bureau at The Hague before the end of 2000.

In conclusion, the Government strongly support the measures in the Bill. Its provisions are sound and its objectives are laudable. It will apply to England, Scotland and Wales—I am advised that Northern Ireland intends to introduce its own legislation in due course. The Bill is compatible with the European convention on human rights, and similar legislation is being considered—if not already enacted—by many of our European partners. The children whom we seek to protect through this Bill cannot plead for themselves: we must act on their behalf. Therefore, I hope that the House will give the Bill a resounding vote of confidence on Second Reading.

2.7 pm

Mr. Oaten: I do not wish to delay the House as I hope that we can proceed speedily to other business. I thank hon. Members for their comments in this morning's excellent and mature debate. I hope that they will forgive me for not responding to their points in detail, but I wish to proceed.

Their congratulations to me are not in order. First, one's place in the private Member's ballot is due completely to luck. Secondly, the Bill was not my idea—I am sure that it would have been on the legislative programme of a future Government of whatever political persuasion. It was a handout Bill. Thirdly, my constituents chose the Bill: I held a ballot in my constituency and let the people decide. Therefore, the congratulations offered to me are completely unnecessary.

This is an important Bill which will make the entire system of intercountry adoption much more professional. It should give those working in the field in social services departments comfort that they can now receive training and resources to support their work. It will comfort prospective adoptive parents to know that they will be treated speedily, efficiently and effectively. Above all, the Bill will provide children with the rights and the protections that we have spoken of so warmly this morning. I hope that the House will support the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.9 pm

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I wholeheartedly believe that

"Social justice means many things, but nothing is more important than a decent place to live."—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1996; Vol. 286, c. 840.]

Those words were spoken by the right hon. Member for Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), now the Deputy Prime Minister.

It is unfortunate that more than 7 million homes in the UK suffer from fuel poverty: that is, the occupants would have to spend more than 10 per cent. of their income keeping the house warm. Most do not spend that money because they cannot afford it, so they sit and shiver in cold homes. There is a mass of medical evidence demonstrating how that leads to increased risk of ill health. The incidence of cardiovascular diseases, bronchitis, flu and respiratory illnesses increases in cold, damp homes, and those diseases can kill.

The UK has a uniquely appalling record on excess deaths during the winter months. Of course, cold homes are not the only factor causing winter death rates to rise, but, in the UK, the death rate increases in winter by around 30 per cent, whereas in Norway and Sweden, the increase is closer to 10 per cent. That suggests that we should be trying to prevent at least two thirds of excess winter deaths. One of the obvious differences between the UK and other parts of Europe is quality of housing.

We should be concerned not only about excess winter deaths, but about quality of life. Although many chronic illnesses may not be fatal, they are debilitating and affect people's ability to enjoy life and participate fully in the economy and society.

To improve quality of life, which I am sure all hon. Members would agree is a worthy goal, we need

"an integrated strategy across government departments to deal with fuel poverty".

according to the Minister for Public Health, who was speaking at a public meeting in her constituency on 10 February.

I ask the House to support the Bill because it will take steps towards achieving that integrated strategy. The health service spends £1 billion a year treating people suffering from cold-related illnesses. The health service suffers the consequences of a higher than 125 per cent. increase in such illnesses during the winter, which include overcrowding, trolleys left in corridors and long waiting lists. Health service involvement is central to any integrated strategy to tackle fuel poverty.

Innovative health authorities such those in Birmingham and Cornwall provided the inspiration for the Bill. They funded improvements to people's homes in cases where they considered that they could prevent illness. In Birmingham, improvements were made to the homes of elderly people and targeted at those whom general practitioners considered at risk of hypothermia. In Cornwall, the improvements were targeted at children with asthma in homes where it was believed that damp conditions and, therefore, mould spores might exacerbate the condition.

The results of the schemes are promising. In Cornwall, the time taken off school by children in the study dropped dramatically from an average of four days a term to half a day a term. Encouraging energy conservation can help children's education. In Birmingham, the GPs' professional opinion is that the scheme should be continued because of the benefits to old people.

Other health authorities have also run schemes. They cost little or nothing but make a difference to people's lives. Having heard about those schemes, I want to encourage other health authorities to consider similar ideas, and that is what the Bill aims to achieve. It will lead to more schemes and to more people benefiting from them. I assure any hon. Member who thinks that those schemes might take much-needed resources from the NHS that several schemes, such as publicising existing grants, cost little. Even the schemes that cost money need not be considered expensive when one takes into account the long-term savings to the health service.

Although the Birmingham and Cornwall schemes are still being examined in detail, many people have realised that money may well be saved by installing modestly priced insulation improvements because they prevent the need to treat people expensively in hospital. One doctor added:

"Furthermore, once they have recovered in hospital, far too often we send them straight back to the place that made them ill!"

I hope that the Bill will deal with that nonsense by enabling health authorities to tackle the causes of illness rather than its symptoms.

I shall briefly outline the way in which the Bill will attempt to achieve that goal. Clause 1 is the heart of the Bill. It requires the Secretary of State to issue guidance to health authorities on including

"annual assessments of the ways in which they should promote or assist with the implementation of energy efficiency schemes in their areas."

The decision to rely on guidance was made following consultation with various health organisations and is supported by the national health service executive, the Royal College of Nursing, the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales and a considerable number of health authorities. The clause allows for flexibility in the guidance.

Clause 1(3) sets out what the guidance may include. Subsection (4) requires health authorities and boards to have regard to that guidance. Subsection (5) sets out what is meant by an energy efficiency scheme, and subsection (6) defines some of the terms used.

Clause 2 will extend the Bill's provisions to Northern Ireland, as requested by Northern Ireland Members. Clause 3 will enable money to be spent if required, although as I have said, the Bill will save rather than cost money.

Clause 4 extends the Bill to Scotland, where it enjoys much support, not least because of the colder climate that we experience most winters and some appalling housing conditions. Many years ago, I appeared on "Kilroy" in Glasgow with people from tenants associations. The depth of their despair about the quality of housing that they had to cope with and the fact that we have still not got round to tackling it are regrettable. I hope that we can give a firm impetus to getting on with tackling it rather than talking about it.

[Sir Robert Smith]

I finish with some thanks. I have received great help and support from health organisations, including the National Health Service Confederation, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of General Practitioners and its Scottish council, the Institute of Health Services Management, the Association of Community Health Councils, the Public Health Alliance and the Patients Association, as well as many other groups connected with health or fuel poverty. Their input, as the people who will have to work with the legislation, has been invaluable and has enabled us to produce a workable, desirable Bill.

I thank those hon. Members on both sides of the House who have supported the Bill and associated early-day motions. I thank them also for their comments while I was preparing it. There was some concern that it would be only a reporting exercise. It is true that it requires all health authorities and boards to examine the Cornwall and Birmingham schemes. That is common sense. They should not act willy-nilly, but should consider carefully what to do. What is good for Cornwall and Birmingham may not be exactly right for Sussex or Aberdeenshire. Local health authorities and boards know what is good for their areas. The Bill requires them to ask that question and then act. It is not a reporting exercise, but a duty to consider carefully before acting. That is a sensible way for public bodies to proceed. I hope that the Bill will make progress today. It is a step along the road to tackling fuel poverty.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I do not want to delay the hon. Gentleman but I fear that I may not get in. I have a few concerns about his Bill, but I intervene on his last point. He hoped that it would make progress. I have received a letter from Rodney Bickerstaffe saying that, unfortunately, it appears that the Government are going to oppose the Bill despite the fact that they say that they want to develop a coherent strategy. He appeals to me as a Member of Parliament noted for my support of initiatives to end fuel poverty to urge the Government to not to oppose it today.

Sir Robert Smith: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. The Government's strategy on this Bill is confusing. If there is time, perhaps the Minister will explain it. The Bill is an important step, and I commend it to the House.

2.17 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I know that time is short, so I will be brief. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) on the Bill, whose spirit and detail are common sense and in line with the Government's overall strategy, regardless of how they think it might fit into that.

I speak as the secretary of the all-party warm homes group, which has campaigned for some time for a co-ordinated national strategy to deal with fuel poverty. Hon. Members will remember last year's Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (Fifteen Year Programme) Bill, which attempted to build support and to win the argument for a co-ordinated strategy to deal with the long-standing national scandal that we have inherited of the 7 million to 8 million households that live in fuel poverty.

There is now general agreement that fragmented measures do not work. I am delighted that the Government have agreed to establish an interdepartmental fuel poverty review group, with the intention of bringing together the various measures of different Departments, central Government, local government and groups funded by, but not directly accountable to, the Government. It is crucial that we bring together that wide range of measures in a co-ordinated national strategy.

The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine outlined the scale of the problem, with 7 million to 8 million households living in fuel poverty, of whom 2.5 million are in severe fuel poverty. Most are pensioners, lone parents or people with mental health problems. Because of the impossibility of heating their homes through normal means, they spend three or four times as much of their weekly income on keeping warm as the average family. Therefore it is a matter of health inequality and of energy efficiency.

Whatever happens to the Bill today, the fuel poverty issue will not go away. I believe that the measure that the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine has outlined is common sense. It is practical, it would have minimal cost and, as pilot schemes in different parts of the country have shown, it can work.

The Government are to be commended for recognising—as the previous Government did not—that fuel poverty is an issue in its own right. They are to be commended for developing health policy to place greater emphasis on preventative health care. The Bill addresses both those concerns, and I believe that it deserves all-party support.

2.20 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The Conservative party will not obstruct the Bill's Second Reading. We all want homes to be energy efficient, but we have some questions to ask about the Bill's practical implications, such as the following. How does one conduct an audit of housing need in terms of fuel efficiency? How does one identify properties where help is needed? How does one establish whether the owner or occupier really needs help? I hope that all those matters will be considered in Committee.

The real dilemma today is that of the Government. The real issue is whether the Government, in their conduct, will be decent or disgraceful. More than half the Minister's Labour colleagues signed early-day motions in favour of the measure; the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) signed all three, and spoke as though the Bill would receive Government support. It obviously will not.

Even the Minister, in a letter to his own constituent, said—I paraphrase—"Of course, I am a Minister; I do not sign EDMs." The letter continued:

"However John does support the broad aims expressed in the motions. As a junior Minister in the Department of Health he will have some considerable input and influence."

Well, that remains to be seen.

Likewise, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in a message to the campaign for the Warm Homes Bill, implies that he does not support a greater winter fuel payment on its own, because he says:

"Simply shovelling money at people to heat the skies above our towns and cities is hardly a sustainable use of resources".

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): I missed the last document to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Is he claiming that that is a letter from me to someone?

Mr. Duncan: No. If the Minister were listening, he would realise that, in a situation of collective responsibility, it is a letter from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, which perhaps carries more weight than his own letter.

Ministers therefore imply that they support the Bill, but I believe that they will not support it. It looks as though we shall get warm words and cold homes.

Many a Labour Member of Parliament has campaigned, implying to people that they will support measures such as this. Grubbing for votes, they signed the EDMs, and they have signed them again since the general election; but today we shall see the Government destroy the Bill's Second Reading. Will they put heat into homes—

Mr. Chaytor: What did the previous Government do, during their 18 years of office, to tackle the problem?

Mr. Duncan: It is time that the hon. Gentleman, and his colleagues, realised that he should take responsibility for the promises that he made before so deceiving an electorate; he should now fulfil the promises that he made in signing early-day motions. When he finds, in seven minutes' time, that everything that he said but four minutes ago is at odds with what the Minister will say and do, he will go away and eat his words.

Let us watch what the Government do today. They are about to destroy the Bill, against everything that they ever said before they were elected.

2.24 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): My goodness, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I do not know what the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) had for breakfast, but, whatever it was, I hope that he will share the recipe with me. Before I respond to his objectionable and highly personalised comments, I remind him, whether he likes it or not, of the deplorable record of the previous Administration in all these matters.

I was intrigued by the—probably tongue-in-cheek—reference that the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), for whom I have a very high regard and respect, made to his record as a champion and defender of those in fuel poverty.

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way in the short time available to him. I was not claiming that myself. It was stated by Rodney Bickerstaffe in his letter to me. Whether he was right or wrong, I cannot judge.

Mr. Hutton: I suspect that, on this occasion, Mr. Bickerstaffe may have been wrong. We had a lengthy opportunity in opposition to study the record of the Conservative Government. The right hon. Gentleman was a distinguished Minister in that Government, and he may correct me if I am wrong in what I am about to say.

We heard a great deal of noise from the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton about fuel poverty. Am I right in my recollection that it was the right hon. Gentleman's Government who extended VAT to gas and electricity? When he was serving as a member of that Government, did he, or did the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton when he was a Back Bencher, at any time vote against that proposal? I believe that the answer is that they did not. With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, we are unpersuaded of the need to accept any lectures from him and his right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Duncan: The difference between me and the Minister is that I do as I say. I do not seek votes, then do the opposite.

Mr. Hutton: I agree with the hon. Gentleman—if he seeks votes, he does not do it terribly well. We remember what happened on 1 May 1997. If that is the result of the hon. Gentleman's grubbing for votes, good luck to him and his right hon. and hon. Friends. They may continue in that vein for as long as they like.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Before the Minister leaves the issue of tax on fuel, will he comment on the fact that the argument for taxing fuel, both domestic and vehicle, was environmental? The idea was to reduce environmental pollution by increasing the tax, thereby making fuel use more efficient or lowering it. How does he justify the fact that his Government impose a penal escalator on vehicle fuel, but reduce the duty on domestic fuel, by implication encouraging its inefficient use and creating pollution?

Mr. Hutton: I am anxious to speak about the Bill, contrary to the wishes of some.

With the greatest respect to the right hon. Gentleman, who may correct me if I am wrong, I understood that the fuel escalator about which he complains was first promulgated by his Government. I know that, as a member of that Government, he loyally supported that Government whenever such issues were debated in the House.

I welcome the interest of the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) in the health and well-being of people living in poor housing and, in particular, in fuel poverty. That interest is shared fully by the Government. We recognise that fuel poverty is a major health concern, and that there are many associations between poor housing and ill health. We accept that the links between cold and damp housing, and respiratory and cardiovascular disease are well established.

Accordingly, I stress to the hon. Gentleman and the House that the Government already have in place a series of initiatives, and proposals for a range of others, that are reducing inequalities and tackling the various factors that cause ill health, of which fuel poverty is only one.

At a national level, the Government are determined to do more to help households in need. We have reduced VAT on fuel, which the Conservative party was keen to impose, so that people can more easily afford to keep warm, and on energy-saving materials installed through Government grant schemes, so that people can more easily insulate their homes.

[Mr. Hutton]

We have released substantial additional funds to help improve our housing stock. In total, some £5 billion is being made available over the lifetime of this Parliament for investment in housing. We have also allocated an additional £150 million specifically for tackling fuel poverty through domestic energy efficiency improvements.

That is in addition to the existing £75 million a year expenditure on the home energy efficiency scheme, our main programme for helping people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. The scheme provides grants up to a maximum of £315 for energy efficiency improvements in the homes of people on benefits, the disabled and those over 60. Those aged 60 or over but not on a qualifying benefit are entitled to a 25 per cent. grant.

We recognise that many of today's pensioners face particular difficulties. That is why we recently announced an increase in the annual winter fuel payment to £100 for more than 7 million pensioner households.

When we came to office, we quickly set up an interdepartmental group to take a hard look at the issues surrounding fuel poverty and to work—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 7 May.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

PLANNING APPEALS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 30 April.

ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 May.

PREVENTION OF DELAY IN TRIALS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 May.

STREETWORKS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 May.

RECYCLED CONTENT OF NEWSPRINT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 23 July.

COMPUTER MILLENNIUM NON-COMPLIANCE (CONTINGENCY PLANS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 23 July.

BUS FUEL DUTY (EXEMPTIONS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [12 March], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 30 April.

PUBLIC HOUSE NAMES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 30 April.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE BILL [*LORDS*] (STANDING COMMITTEE) (SITTINGS)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding paragraphs (a) and (b) of the Sessional Order of 16th December, relating to Meetings of Standing Committees, the Standing Committee on the Access to Justice Bill *[Lords]* may meet at any hour.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

Lone Parents (Benefits)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

2.31 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Inequality has grown faster in Britain than in any other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country, with the exception of New Zealand. That is not just a question of income and wealth, nor should it rely on definitions of occupational class. Poverty is defined as a socially constructed set of markers for disadvantage—for example, social tenancy, reliance on means-tested social security benefits and so on.

Lone parents stand out clearly as a group in poverty and hardship. Although only 15 per cent. of other families with children are social tenants, 66 per cent. of lone parents are in that category. Although 10 per cent. of other families are on benefits, the figure for lone parents is more than 50 per cent. Similar figures are recorded for means-tested benefits.

Even among the minority of lone parents who have jobs, more than 50 per cent. claim some type of benefit and achieve council tax relief, and three out of 10 receive lowly maintenance payments. It is estimated that 1.7 million lone parents have responsibilities for 2.9 million children and they are a main force in the driving up of the published poverty figures. It is estimated that, soon, 25 per cent. of all British families with dependent children will have one parent and that there will be more than 3 million such children.

More than any other large group of people of working age, perhaps with the exception of the disabled, lone parents face great circumstantial barriers to work. It is estimated that one lone parent in six has never had a proper job. The stress associated with their lives—I shall not go into the shambles of the Child Support Agency in that context—is reflected in one in three of them having been subjected to domestic violence. After a relationship breaks down, there is also a stressful limbo period in which benefits are sorted out and assessed, and lone parents struggle to provide reassurance and comfort to their small children.

It is estimated that lone parent incomes are 50 per cent. of those of two-parent families. Lone parents have rent arrears and repayment problems in excess of those of all other groups. They are often in damp, poor-quality housing with no central heating, which suffers from vermin and unattended repairs. One in 10 report health problems, which restrict their ability to enter the work market.

All that is well documented, researched and understood, but another feature has emanated from some prominent and brilliant research by Dorsett and Marsh of the Policy Studies Institute—80 per cent. of lone parents smoke. In comparison, only 20 per cent. of better-off young women in a similar age group smoke. I contend that no tobacco company could ever have achieved such a figure by pushing for the elimination of tobacco tax or even by inducing the public to believe that no health hazards are associated with smoking.

More than 1 million young women living on their own smoke, and excessively. It damages their health and initiates the cancer process. A report was published

[Dr. Ian Gibson]

yesterday that described how poor people develop more cancers and are more likely to die of the disease than the rich, who benefit from better conditions of life. Smoking also damages the hearts and lungs of those young women. The researchers' contention is that smoking is linked with poverty, pessimism and poor health, and the poor health of children. All of those are major features in the lives of lone parents. The researchers often use smoking as a barometer of the social situation of lone parents.

Lone parents also find it hard to quit smoking. Continual hardship blocks them into a pattern of smoking excessively. Smoking behaviour is a result of a complex interplay of contemporary and historical circumstances, but the 80 per cent. figure is still astonishing. The spiral that those people are in means that it is hard for them to get a job and improve their lives.

Three issues demand departmental interaction at Government level, both inter-Department and intra-Department. The first issue is the challenge for health promotion, the second is the consideration of a welfare-to-health project and the third is the welfare-to-work programme. All three are necessary to solve the deep social problem, if lone parents are to control their lives.

Lone parents who smoke pay nearly £300 million a year back to the Treasury, which is 17 per cent. of their share of income support. A fraction of that money spent on a major effort to mobilise lone parents against tobacco would help to remove them from the spiral that traps them in poverty. Nicotine patches should be freely available to them, because the research shows that many young women smokers would like to quit, and that would assist them. Only a significant enrichment of their lives will produce results. No approach to improving lone parents' health behaviour will mean anything unless it is embedded in a broader appreciation of their circumstances and an understanding of how those circumstances can change.

Income has only a small effect on determining smoking habits. Income is a measure of the spending resources available to a lone mother and its value is dependent on the prices of the goods bought. For the smoker, an increase in the price of cigarettes represents a fall in the real value of their income. The effect of income in determining smoking is small, implying that the effect of an increase in the price of cigarettes will also be small. Ciggy money is often set aside in the same way as that for food and fuel, so taxing cigarettes will not solve the problems I have described.

I welcome the new deal initiatives—including the child care benefits and the recently announced work benefits—to get lone parents into work and enable them to keep work. However, the hypothesis that the researchers put forward is that welfare to health could be an initiator to lift lone parents from the spiral of despair. It could be set up quickly and would not disrupt the original intention of the welfare-to-work programmes. Given the trends in workplaces against smoking, lone parents could become more likely to find a job if they give up.

The right to smoke is not an issue. The link between smoking and poverty is clearly established. Rather than choosing not to smoke, lone parents are constrained by their circumstances, which prevent them from relinquishing the habit. In politics, we have to start from where people are, and in this case they are in hardship and despair. To start the journey to reliable employment and child care, we must get lone parents to kick the smoking habit and reclaim its cost relative to income.

2.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) on securing the debate. His comments on smoking are primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health, because it has a tie-in with the Department of Health. Smoking is disproportionately high among all people living in poverty, including lone parents.

The Government are committed to helping lone parents to give up smoking. Last December's White Paper, "Smoking Kills", for the first time put services to help people to quit smoking at the heart of the NHS's work. The Government announced that they would make £60 million of extra cash available over the next three years to develop new services.

As with the benefits system, the poorest smokers are our main priority. This year, £10 million will go to the 26 health action zones to start work to help people in deprived areas to quit smoking. The package includes a week's free nicotine replacement therapy for smokers who are on benefit, including lone parents on income support. The Government have already taken steps to help in the areas to which my hon. Friend referred.

I should like to take this opportunity to outline the range of other action that the Government are taking to lift lone parents out of their current hardship, which my hon. Friend has identified. We want to get to the root cause rather than just to tackle the symptoms. When the Government came into office, more than 1 million lone parents were on income support and bringing up about 2 million children. I am pleased to say that those numbers are now coming down, but there are still far too many workless lone parent families, who often remain workless for far too long.

A life on income support can never provide the benefits of inclusion in the world of work. It is undoubtedly hard, and it is not just materially hard: families' health can be affected; children's educational prospects can be damaged; and their future economic prospects as adults may be less bright. It is time to put an end to living in a divided country, with too many families trapped in a cycle of poverty and worklessness: a country in which lone parent families in particular are consigned to a life of hardship. That must be changed. The previous Government criticised lone parents as scroungers, and took little action. They were given no practical help to break out of the cycle of poverty. The Government are changing that.

The route out of persistent hardship is to get into work. Lone parents know that a job offers them the opportunity to improve their family's life. That is why, not unsurprisingly, nine out of 10 lone parents want to be in work. We are trying to remove the many barriers to work that they face. We are using welfare spending as an investment to lift lone parents and their families out of poverty.

Our current £190 million investment in the new deal for lone parents, which my hon. Friend mentioned, provides individually tailored, practical help to people who have

been offered no help before. To date, more than 40,000 lone parents have joined the new deal and, now it is available nationally, thousands more are taking part each month. We are getting real help to tens of thousands of lone parents making the difficult journey from a life stuck on benefit to a new life in work with further opportunities. As a result of our programme, more than 7,000 have already found jobs.

We are changing the culture associated with lone parents and work. It is a real change for lone parents to be shown that work can be a viable option for them. We are building on that in the single work-focused gateway pilots, which will be established from June onwards. Lone parents claiming income support will be required to attend an interview to learn about how they can be helped to independence through work. It is about informing every lone parent's choice. It is not enough to make sure that welfare offers support and advice to them: we must ensure that work really lifts lone parents out of hardship.

The working families tax credit, which will be introduced in October, will help to do just that, because it will provide more generous help to support families in work than the current family credit, and it will help 400,000 more families than the current system. Importantly for lone parents, the support that it provides for child care is more generous than that on offer previously. The WFTC is a £5 billion-a-year investment in making sure that families can get away—and keep away—from those workless households and the cycle of poverty to which my hon. Friend referred. It will provide vital help for hundreds of thousands of lone parent families.

Child maintenance can also play a key role in ensuring that work really pays for lone parents. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise and welcome the fact that, under the WFTC, all maintenance payments will be disregarded. Reform of the child support system, a subject that my hon. Friend rather skirted round, will create a simpler, more efficient system, and will get more non-resident parents to pay to support their children.

In our wide-ranging and innovative reforms, we have not neglected the need for other changes to help lone parents. In the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that, from this October, when lone parents on income support obtained jobs they would continue to receive that benefit for the first two weeks during which were in work. Having to meet new costs such as the costs of travel and child care, as well as having to wait for up to a month to receive wages, can present what appears to be an unbridgeable gap to people contemplating a return to work. Organisations representing lone parents are delighted with the change, which they say will make a real difference. Again, we are investing welfare money in ending the problems that worklessness causes them and their children.

When we consider what Government can do to help families in hardship, we do not confine ourselves to social security and the new deals. We believe that all Departments should work together. The national minimum wage, the national child care strategy and the promotion of family-friendly employment practices will help us to achieve our aim, and we are working across Government to deal with the consequences of past economic failures that are already afflicting our communities. We are investing £40 billion in the modernisation of health and education, £800 million in the new deal for communities—with which we intend to address the multiple social problems in our poorest areas—and £540 million in the sure start programme, which is intended to help young children who are at particular risk of social exclusion.

Let there be no doubt that the Government are committed to combating poverty and social exclusion. Earlier this month, in his Beveridge lecture, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister placed us at the start of an historic mission to end child poverty over this generation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will be publishing annual reports on how we are tackling the causes of poverty across the board, which will constitute an annual audit, and will keep an eye on the task that is before us.

We can achieve our aims only by increasing opportunity and reducing the inequality that is caused by prolonged worklessness, and improving the position of lone parents and their children must be at the heart of that. We have already made bold reforms, and have invested in an active system of welfare in its widest sense. We will continue to take action across Government to combat poverty.

Many lone parents and their children have already begun to benefit from the Government support that they deserve, and many more will do so during the coming years of this Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 13 April 1999

PRIME MINISTER

Policy Unit (Travel)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions when his *(a)* Chief of Staff and *(b)* Chief Press Secretary formed part of the official party accompanying him on overseas visits, indicating the costs; and if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 8 December 1998, *Official Report*, column *143*, to include the period from the end of October 1998 to the end of February 1999. [76816]

The Prime Minister: My Chief Press Secretary has accompanied me on all my overseas visits except three. My Chief of Staff has accompanied me on approximately a third. The costs of all officials, including my Chief Press Secretary and Chief of Staff, who accompany me on overseas visits are accounted for within the total costs of my overseas visits provided in previous answers.

For the period 1 May 1997 to 3 March 1999, members of the policy unit have travelled overseas on official business on 44 occasions. The average cost of their official travel was approximately £600 per person.

All visits have been made in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with representatives of the United States Government on genetically modified organisms since 31 July 1998; and if he will give the dates of these discussions. [80107]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *471–72*.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what sorts of unforeseen circumstances were envisaged when adding that caveat to his statement that the United Kingdom will not join the Euro Zone during the present Parliament. [80165]

The Prime Minister: In his statement to the House of Commons in October 1997, the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out five economic tests which will have to be met before any decision to join a successful single currency can be taken. Applying the economic tests, the Government believe there is no realistic prospect of the UK economy having demonstrated, before the end of this Parliament, convergence which is sustainable and settled. Barring any fundamental and unforeseen change in economic circumstances, making a decision, during this Parliament, to join is not realistic.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister which Minister is responsible for advising the Cabinet on whether the five economic tests for the United Kingdom participation in EMU have been met; and what consultation in respect of that advice will be undertaken. [80175]

The Prime Minister: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has responsibility for United Kingdom policy on European Community monetary and economic issues. The final decision on whether or not the UK should join the single currency is for the British people in a referendum.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what staff have been tasked to monitor progress in passing the five economic tests for joining the euro. [80147]

The Prime Minister: HM Treasury is the department responsible for economic and monetary union issues.

European Commissioners

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what regulations or conventions exist to provide for the maintenance of political neutrality by European Commissioners in speeches targeted at a national audience in an area of domestic controversy. [80164]

The Prime Minister: Commissioners must act in accordance with the Community Treaties. They are required by Article 157 of the Treaty establishing the European Community to be completely independent in the performance of their duties. As such, they are not allowed to take instructions from any Government or from any other body, and must refrain from any action incompatible with their duties.

European Movement and Federal Trust

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister when *(a)* he and *(b)* representatives from his office, next plan to meet representatives of (i) the European Movement and (ii) the Federal Trust. [80146]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Sir R. Body) on 19 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *917*.

Mrs. Rosemary Nelson

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he received from Garvaghy Road Residents Chairman, Mr. Brendan McKenna, on police protection for the solicitor, Mrs. Rosemary Nelson; and what action he took in response. [80233]

The Prime Minister: None.

Single Currency

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *228*, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's oral statement of 27 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns 583–88, if he will set out the constitutional and political implications of the United Kingdom joining the European single currency. [80247]

The Prime Minister: As the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his statement to the House of Commons in October 1997, the determining factor underpinning any

Government decision on membership of the single currency is whether the economic case for the UK joining is clear and unambiguous.

The October 1997 statement acknowledged that to share a common monetary policy with other states does represent a major pooling of economic sovereignty. It also stated that, if the economic benefits are clear and unambiguous, there is no constitutional bar to British membership of EMU.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Child Abuse

Ms Moran: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases of child abuse in respect of children aged *(a)* zero to four years, *(b)* four to six years and *(c)* six to 10 years have been forwarded by police forces to the CPS in the last five years; and of those how many (i) have been dropped by the CPS and (ii) were prosecuted in court. [80088]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service holds no central records in respect of specific offences. The information requested could be obtained only by examining each relevant file in every CPS office, at disproportionate cost.

Racial Incidents

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been for incidents of incitement to racial hatred which took place in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham in (i) 1997 and (ii) 1998. [79875]

The Attorney-General: There have been no prosecutions or convictions for offences of racial hatred located in the Borough of Hammersmith or Fulham in either 1997 or 1998.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* black and *(b)* Asian people work in his private office. [79774]

The Attorney-General: Information relating to ethnicity is not usually given where numbers are small enough to enable identification of individuals. However, the staff in my private office have consented to the provision of this information. None of the three members of staff at present in my private office is Black or Asian.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities have been appointed as CPS chief crown prosecutors to date. [79779]

The Attorney-General: Of the 42 Chief Crown Prosecutors and 3 Assistant Chief Crown Prosecutors for London whose appointments were recently announced, 8 are women and 1 has self-declared as being from an ethnic minority. 4 of those appointed did not complete the Ethnic Minority Self-Declaration form.

CPS Papers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General what the procedure is for inquiring into leaks of confidential Crown Prosecution Service papers. [79840]

The Attorney-General: Crown Prosecution Service security policy requires that all suspected leaks be reported to the Departmental Security Officer. Suspected leaks are then investigated by the CPS rapidly and thoroughly.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General if he will investigate the leak of the internal Crown Prosecution Service report into the police investigation of electoral malpractice in east and north-east London; and if he will make a statement. [79839]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service is currently undertaking an inquiry into an alleged leak.

Freemasons

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 2, on freemasons, what plans he has to publish the register of lawyers declaring their masonic status; and if he will make a statement. [79810]

The Attorney-General: The position remains as stated in my answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 2, that the CPS is considering the format of a register in conjunction with the Departments affected by the Government's policy.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Staff (Ethnic Origin)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin, at 1 March, of *(a)* his Private Office, *(b)* Government special advisers, *(c)* his policy unit and *(d)* staff in total. [78498]

Mr. Straw: A voluntary self-classification system is used to record the ethnic origin of staff in the Home Office. For my Private Office[1] the breakdown of staff by ethnic origin on 22 March is set out in the table. As the numbers of staff with ethnic minority origins within Private Office are small, only a percentage of staff are shown to protect the privacy of individuals (in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Civil Service Ethnic Monitoring Code of Practice).

Home Office Private Office staff by ethnic origin[2]

Ethnic origin	*Percentage in Private Office*
Asian-Bangladeshi	1.6
Asian-Chinese	1.6
Asian-Indian	6.6
Asian-Other	1.6
Asian-Pakistani	3.3
Black-Caribbean	5
All Ethnic Minority Groups	20
White	80

[1] Ministerial Secretariat (including the Permanent Secretary's Office)
[2] Of those whose ethnicity is recorded 89.5 per cent. of Private Office staff

With regard to special advisers, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *39*.

With regard to Home Office staff as a whole, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 31 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *710–11*.

I do not have a policy unit.

Interpol

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many international warrants for arrest and extradition are held by Interpol for citizens of the United Kingdom. [78794]

Kate Hoey: I am advised by the National Criminal Intelligence Service that there are currently in circulation 107 Interpol notices in respect of persons who are United Kingdom citizens by birth. This is a figure for notices issued by Interpol bureaux world-wide, under what is known as the Red Notice procedure. In some countries, not including the United Kingdom, a Red Notice may serve as a provisional warrant of arrest for extradition purposes.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the procedures by which *(a)* Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* the citizen concerned are notified of international warrants for arrest and extradition held by Interpol in respect of UK citizens. [78791]

Kate Hoey: This is an operational matter as between Interpol bureaux world-wide. There is no procedure whereby Her Majesty's Government are notified that a United Kingdom citizen is the subject of an Interpol notice. The person concerned will become aware of the fact if and when he is located and arrested.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many telephone lines exist at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate offices in Croydon. [79303]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate Croydon has 377 telephone lines; these are:

265 telephone lines which can take incoming calls

25 telephone lines reserved for members of the public making general immigration inquiries or inquiries about progress of a particular case

5 telephone lines for requests for an Application Form

10 lines for inquiries from employers about Immigration Law

12 lines giving recorded information about the more common type of inquiry

60 telephone lines which are reserved for outgoing calls

5,500 telephone extensions which can be directly dialled from outside.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many telephone operators work at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate offices in Croydon. [79302]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are currently fifty-nine officers dealing with telephone inquiries received in the Integrated Casework Directorate based in Croydon. However, approximately 25 per cent. of an operator's time is spent on written work and therefore away from the telephone. In addition, the Croydon estate has two operators who deal with non casework telephone traffic.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to tackle the backlog of work at Lunar House; and over what period. [80395]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have set up a task team of senior officials and Siemens Business Services to determine the measures necessary to improve services substantially and to tackle the backlog of cases. Steps already taken include special exercises to target priority cases such as work permit applications, changes in procedures that will result in higher productivity, and increased staffing. Levels of service to the public are gradually being restored and improved.

Clandestine Entrants

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has made to *(a)* United Kingdom, *(b)* European Union and *(c)* other international business organisations regarding clandestine entrants seeking to enter the United Kingdom through consignments; [78612]

(2) what advice he has given to United Kingdom businesses concerned in the consignment of goods to the United Kingdom through European Union ports of embarkation about the prevention of clandestine entrants. [78613]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 29 March 1999]*: I have had a number of meetings with representatives of the road haulage industry and officials meet regularly with this group and with representatives of shipping and air transport companies. I understand that the transportation companies in their turn have discussions with their customers. There has been little, if any, direct contact between the Home Office and individual businesses regarding the problems of clandestine entrants; and we have not made any separate representations or issued separate advice to those bodies, beyond the representations and advice given to hauliers and other transportation companies.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent to which clandestine entrants change vehicles during ferry crossings. [78614]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 29 March 1999]*: Neither the Immigration Service nor the major ferry operator at Dover has presented any evidence that would support the suggestion that clandestine entrants change vehicles during ferry crossings. It would be difficult for would-be clandestine entrants to leave one vehicle and enter another on a well-lit car ferry deck monitored by Closed Circuit Television cameras without being seen, and the individuals concerned would gain no advantage by doing so.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has given to lorry drivers and the road haulage industry as to *(a)* how to deal

with clandestine entrants discovered in vehicles on entry to the United Kingdom and *(b)* the physical risk to drivers in such circumstances. [78610]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 29 March 1999]*: The advice given to date relates to safeguards to prevent would-be illegal entrants from securing entry in the first place. Where a driver discovers people in his vehicle whom he suspects may have entered the country illegally, he should inform the police or the local immigration office.

I welcome the fact that the Freight Transport Association has issued guidance to its members. The Immigration Service will be working closely with the FTA and the Road Haulage Association to develop the proposed Code of Practice. In doing so, they will draw on the FTA's helpful advice.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has made to ferry operators in the last 12 months on improving security to prevent clandestine entrants gaining access to the United Kingdom; and if he will list the measure taken as a result. [78611]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 29 March 1999]*: Immigration Service staff are in regular contact with the major ferry operators arriving at Dover. Following discussions about clandestine immigration through Belgian ports, a number of changes have been made to port security procedures at Ostend and Zeebrugge. These include increased police patrols on access roads, night patrols in the port area and systematic loading checks. I understand that ferry operators have also met the Calais Chamber of Commerce to discuss improving security at that port.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he received from voluntary organisations requesting exemption from charges to finance the Criminal Records Bureau; and if he will make a statement. [79533]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) on 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *608–09*.

Police Contingency Reserves

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *105*, if he will list those police forces where contingency reserves are lower than the level recommended by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy; and if he will make a statement. [79425]

Mr. Boateng: A list of forces with unallocated reserves or balances below the 2.0 per cent. minimum level recommended by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) is set out as listed. Published figures on police authority reserves relate to a specific point in time and may not give any indication about future commitments. The list reflects the position as at 31 March 1998. The CIPFA advice to police authorities on reserves and balances was issued in December 1998.

Police Forces with general balances below 2.0 per cent. of net revenue expenditure at 31 March 1998:

Avon and Somerset
City of London
Cumbria
Dorset
Dyfed-Powys
Essex
Humberside
Lincolnshire
Metropolitan Police
Northumbria
West Midlands
West Yorkshire

Source:
CIPFA.

Child Curfew

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department *(a)* how many local authorities had applied to introduce a local child curfew and *(b)* were undertaking local consultation on introducing a local child curfew at the latest date for which the information is available. [79426]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *590*.

Medway Secure Training Centre

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* assaults on staff by inmates, including those resulting in staff being referred for medical treatment and those leading to criminal charges, *(b)* assaults on trainees by other trainees and *(c)* incidents of concerted indiscipline, there have been by young persons at the Medway Secure Training Centre since his answer of 9 November 1999, *Official Report*, column *43*; and if he will make a statement. [79427]

Mr. Boateng: In the period from 9 November to end February, the contractor has recorded a total of 18 assaults on staff by trainees. All staff involved were seen by medical staff as a matter of course. 17 assaults on trainees by other trainees have been recorded. None of the incidents led to criminal charges. Two incidents of concerted indiscipline have been recorded.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many trainees there currently are at the Medway Secure Training Centre. [79377]

Mr. Boateng: As of 31 March, there were 30 young people at the Medway Secure Training Centre.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff have resigned or been dismissed from the Medway Secure Training Centre since his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *43*; and if he will make a statement. [79428]

Mr. Boateng: There have been 10 resignations since 9 November, two of whom have since successfully applied for reinstatement.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress on implementing at the Medway Secure Training Centre each of the recommendations of the Social Services Inspectorate report. [79376]

Mr. Boateng: Progress against the agreed action plan is being monitored closely. Measures have already been taken to address the most urgent problems including the introduction of a new staffing structure to strengthen management of the centre, and to improve operational procedures. A programme of refurbishment work is underway, and new staff have been recruited. The Social Services Inspectorate will undertake a further inspection shortly to evaluate progress against the action plan, and the effectiveness of the action already taken.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the current number of staff at the Medway Secure Training Centre is the full complement. [79429]

Mr. Boateng: The current number of staff at Medway is 109.5. The agreed staff complement of 100.5 is subject to further review in the light of the Social Services Inspectorate report.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if further contract payments have been reduced since his answer of 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *43*, to reflect performance points accumulated in the recent periods at the Medway Secure Training Centre; and if he will make a statement. [79430]

Mr. Boateng: At the end of the second and third quarters, contract payments were reduced by £14,730 and £22,691 respectively, reflecting performance points accumulated by the contractor in those periods.

Police (Private Companies)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to transfer to private companies functions currently undertaken by police officers. [79380]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no such plans.

Police (Efficiency)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department will take if police forces fail to make the target 2 per cent. year on year efficiency gains; and if he will make a statement. [79375]

Mr. Boateng: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 21 July 1998, *Official Report*, column 915, that the police would receive an extra £1.24 billion over the next three years. Part of the additional funding for the second and third years will be dependent on forces achieving the target of 2 per cent. efficiency improvements a year set by the Comprehensive Spending Review. The arrangements we have put in place for the Home Office to monitor and review police efficiency plans jointly with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Audit Commission will give forces every opportunity to demonstrate that they are meeting this target, and that the resources released have been reinvested to improve delivery of frontline national and local policing priorities.

Crime and Disorder Audit

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the deadline for each local crime and disorder audit to be submitted to his Department; if he will list those authorities which have submitted an audit; how many audits have been referred back to local authorities by his Department for further work; what representations he has received concerning the audits; and if he will make a statement. [79378]

Mr. Boateng: There is no provision in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requiring the local crime and disorder reduction partnerships to submit their audits and strategies to my Department for approval. The Act requires that strategies be formulated by 1 April 1999 and published locally. My Department will continue to work with the Audit Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and other key partners to support the local partnerships in their work and to monitor their effectiveness. I am impressed by what I have seen of their determination to carry out their tasks in an effective and timely manner, but, if there are indications that particular partnerships are failing to exercise their functions under the Act, the Home Secretary is empowered to ask them for a report on their progress.

Immigration Staff

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* immigration officers and *(b)* other immigration staff who will be employed in dealing with leave to enter in each of the next five years. [78648]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 29 March 1999]*: None. The number of staff likely to be dealing with leave to enter over the next five years will depend upon a variety of factors, such as the extent of any growth in international passenger traffic as well as the impact of the measures set out in the White Paper 'Fairer, Faster And Firmer—A Modern Approach To Immigration And Asylum' designed to improve the operation of the on-entry control.

Lancet Inquiry

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what charges have been made by the Lancet inquiry against the officer whose name has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement. [79412]

Mr. Boateng: I have not been sent any names of officers by the Operation Lancet inquiry. No police officers have been charged with offences as a result of Operation Lancet Inquiry to date, but the inquiry is continuing and I understand that a number of possible criminal and disciplinary matters are still under investigation.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the serving CID officers in Cleveland Police Force are under investigation in the Lancet inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [79409]

Mr. Boateng: 31 Cleveland CID Officers are under investigation in Operation Lancet. Of these, 8 are suspended, which equates to 4 per cent. of the Force CID strength. The other 23 CID officers have not been suspended and continue to perform their daily duties. The

duties of the suspended officers are being undertaken by other officers to ensure that the operational effectiveness of the CID is maintained.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of person hours devoted to date to the Lancet inquiry regarding alleged police corruption in Cleveland; and if he will make a statement. [79410]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested on the number of person hours devoted to the Operation Lancet Inquiry is not readily available.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *173*, on the Lancet inquiry, if he will provide a breakdown of the costs of the inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [79588]

Mr. Boateng: The breakdown of costs is as follows:

	£000
Cost of Cleveland Officers (salaries, etc)	692
Cost of Northamptonshire Officers (salaries, accommodation and subsistence)	426
Other expenditure (overtime, consumable stores, etc)	129
Total	1,247

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of that part of the Lancet inquiry known as the Redwood inquiry in terms of costs and number of police officers involved; and if he will make a statement. [79590]

Mr. Boateng: The "Redwood" inquiry is an on-going investigation and, for operational reasons, it would not be appropriate at this stage to make any further comment.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the special inquiry taking place in the Cleveland police force. [79589]

Mr. Boateng: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave him on 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *173*.

Motor Projects Research

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those taking part in the projects described in Motor Projects in England and Wales Research Findings No. 81 were offenders in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1999. [79339]

Mr. Boateng: Research Findings No. 81, 'Motor Projects in England and Wales', examined two-year reconvictions for offenders sentenced to Probation run Motor Projects between the end of 1989 and 1993. No information is available centrally on what proportions of those were offenders in 1999. Of those in the sample, 433 (40 per cent.) were sentenced in 1993.

Overall, Research Findings No. 81 showed that nearly 80 per cent. of offenders were reconvicted for an offence within two years.

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the projects included in the research base described in Motor Projects in England and Wales Research Findings No. 81 still operate. [79395]

Mr. Boateng: Research Findings No. 81, "Motor Projects in England and Wales", examined 42 projects. Current information is available on only 21 of these projects which were jointly managed by probation services in partnership with other bodies. Of these 21, the following are still operating:

West Yorkshire: "BUMPY" Project

West Sussex: "Car Offenders Project" (now "Responsible Drivers")

Shropshire: "Drive" Project

Inner London: "Ilderton Motor Project"

Somerset: "Mendip Motor Project" (now "Somerset Motor Project")

Greater Manchester: "STOP" Project

Oxfordshire: "TRAX" Motor Project

Buckinghamshire: "Wheel-right"

Nottingham: "Wheelbase".

We are making inquiries about the other 21 projects and I shall write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Satellite Network Interception

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed agreement on the remote approach to satellite network interceptions at the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council of 12 March; which country objected; on what grounds; and what is the Government's policy on this issue. [79490]

Kate Hoey: The remote access approach would enable member states to maintain an interception capability against serious criminals using satellite telephones on their territory. There would be no need to seek the technical assistance of the member state with the ground station in individual cases.

Italy, which hosts the first satellite ground station in the European Union, took the view at the Council that the member state with the satellite ground station should be given a guarantee that the intercepting member state would protect its constitutional principles and national security when using the remote access approach.

The Government share the view of other member states that there is no substantive role for the member state with the ground station in the remote access approach. The Government have explained their position to the European Scrutiny Committees in their Explanatory Memorandum of 3 March 1999 on Council document 6195–99. A copy is in the Library.

EU Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the contents of the papers he intends to present to the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council on *(a)* mutual recognition of court decisions and judgments and *(b)* access to justice in civil matters. [79422]

Kate Hoey: The United Kingdom's discussion paper on the mutual recognition of court decisions and judgments in criminal matters was submitted to the Article K4 Committee of the European Union on 29 March. It follows up the initiative of the United Kingdom Presidency at the Cardiff European Council.

the conclusions of which called on the Council to identify the scope for greater mutual recognition of decisions of each other's courts. The paper and an Explanatory Memorandum were deposited for scrutiny on 31 March and a copy of each has been placed in the Library.

The aim of the initiative is to develop a regime where each state recognises as valid certain pre and post conviction decisions of another member state's judicial authorities with the minimum of formality. Recognition would be given even though the decision has been taken under different laws and rules. The discussion paper develops this idea by setting out the current obstacles to judicial co-operation, current measures to improve judicial co-operation and suggestions on how mutual recognition could contribute towards the long-term development of judicial co-operation in the European Union.

Mutual recognition of all court decisions is unlikely to be achievable in the near future, but the paper envisages a work programme that identifies short to medium term objectives as well as long term goals, and the preparatory work needed in order to achieve them. The paper proposes that such a programme should include an examination of the following possible proposals: the enforcement of sanctions following criminal convictions; the possibility of dispensing with formal letters of request and dual criminality requirements for mutual legal assistance; the possible abolition of grounds for refusing extradition such as the political offence exception, dual criminality and restrictions of the extradition of member states' own nationals; the possibility of fast track extradition through mutual recognition of arrest warrants and convictions, or a new "Eurowarrant" system; and the possible mutual recognition of orders or warrants concerning assets or evidence.

The key underlying concept behind the paper is the principle that member states of the European Union should be able to have full confidence in each other's legal systems. Progress towards mutual recognition may therefore depend on agreeing common minimum standards and safeguards, for example on the treatment of suspects in custody and procedures for ensuring that the standards and safeguards are actually applied.

The issue of access to justice in civil matters falls within the ministerial responsibility of the Lord Chancellor. The paper is still in preparation, but it is intended that it will invite the member states to consider ways of making it easier for people from one European Union country to bring litigation in another, making use of the other member state's legal system. Notwithstanding the Brussels Convention, the costs of such litigation often make it uneconomic to pursue small and medium sized claims and there is clear evidence that the perceived difficulty in obtaining redress if things go wrong is a major deterrent to buying goods abroad. It is, therefore, a significant obstacle to the proper functioning of the internal market.

This initiative follows up a conference on resolving small claims across borders, hosted by the Lord Chancellor's Department during the United Kingdom Presidency of the European Union last year, and other initiatives already adopted by the Community including the Action Plan on Consumers' Access to Justice.

Immigration (Latvian Citizens)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Latvian citizens entered the UK in each of the last five years; how many were refused entry to the United Kingdom; and if he will list the reasons for refusal. [79688]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Latvians were not separately identified in immigration statistics prior to 1998, when 21,800 passengers were admitted and 340 were refused leave to enter and removed from the United Kingdom. 280 of the latter were not considered to be genuinely seeking entry as visitors, nearly 20 had unsatisfactory arrangements or non-genuine intentions for entry as students and over 40 were refused for various other reasons.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79647]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*. The requirements of the Ministerial Code also apply to Parliamentary Private Secretaries when attending any meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

CitizenCard

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what will be the legal status of the proposed CitizenCard; on what basis the cost of the scheme was agreed; and what plans he has to restrict future increases in the cost of obtaining a CitizenCard; [79636]

(2) if the police will accept the proposed CitizenCard as a legal document; and what arrangements will be made to enable retailers to check the validity of the document. [79637]

Mr. George Howarth: CitizenCard is an industry sponsored proof of age scheme which was launched on 15 February. The Government have welcomed it but its operation is a matter for the promoters.

Mental Illness

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of basic training for police officers relates to mental illness; and what proportion of that training is about the Mental Health Act 1983. [79673]

Mr. Boateng: I understand that probationers in both the Metropolitan Police and other forces in England and Wales receive formal training on mental illness amounting to a total of about half a day during the course of their probationer training. In both cases, this training is supplemented by practical role play exercises which can be used to reinforce learning. In addition, a considerable

time is devoted to vulnerable witnesses and arrested persons during the course of lessons on the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, Codes of Practice and interviewing.

It is also open to forces and Metropolitan Police areas to provide additional training on this subject if there is a particular need for it locally.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people from (i) black and (ii) other ethnic minorities were detained by the police under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in 1998; [79676]

(2) how many people were detained by the police under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in 1998; [79675]

(3) what change there was in the amount of police time spent dealing with mentally disordered people over the five years from 1993 to 1998; [79686]

(4) how many injuries occurred to *(a)* persons being conveyed and *(b)* the police when police were involved in conveying people to hospital or a place of safety under the Mental Health Act 1983 in 1998; [79687]

(5) what was the average number of hours per week that police officers were involved in conveying people to hospital or a place of safety under the Mental Health Act 1983 in 1998; [79685]

(6) if he intends to issue guidance to police regarding the restraint of people known to have a mental illness for the purposes of conveying people to hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983; [79674]

(7) what the average number of hours per week spent by the police detaining people under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 was in 1998; [79677]

(8) how many offences by the person concerned were recorded following a disposal under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 in 1998. [79678]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested about police activity in respect of mentally disordered people detained under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 is not collected centrally. The Self-Defence and Restraint Committee of the Association of Chief Police Officers is currently revising its manual on "conflict resolution" and it is expected that this will contain guidance regarding the restraint of people known to have mental illness. I have been advised that this will be issued later this year.

Smoke Alarms

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the *(a)* desirability and *(b)* practicality of making the installation of smoke alarms in domestic dwellings mandatory; and what steps he is taking to encourage the installation of smoke alarms in domestic dwellings. [79608]

Mr. George Howarth: Smoke alarms make a significant contribution to the protection of life and property from fire and I believe it is desirable for every household to have at least one smoke detector. Promoting the need to have a properly maintained smoke alarm is a centre piece of our new strategy to reduce dwelling fire deaths by 20 per cent. by 2003. The Home Office ran a major campaign with the fire service on this theme at the start of the year. I also announced last December a £14 million investment in a new National Community Fire Safety Centre which is intended to help deliver the reduction in fire deaths in the home.

Since 1992, Buildings Regulations have required all new dwellings in England and Wales to have a smoke alarm installed. This move, together with our wider publicity and educational efforts, has helped to raise smoke alarm ownership levels in all households to 82 per cent. However, ownership levels are much lower in those households which are actually having most fires and we are focusing on how to get the smoke alarm message to the hard to reach groups.

The possibility of introducing a mandatory requirement on all households was considered by the Community Fire Safety Task Force whose 1997 report, *Safe as Houses*, outlined a new strategy on reducing fire deaths. The Government accepted their finding that, although such a proposal does have attractions, the enforcement difficulties and the infringements on personal choice were likely to be excessive. Instead, it advocated a far greater level of publicity and education to build upon the significant improvement on ownership levels which have already been achieved. The investment in the new National Centre is designed to deliver that outcome.

Immigration and Asylum White Paper

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if officials in his Department prepared an assessment of the responses to the White Paper on immigration and asylum. [79710]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Home Office officials provided advice about the responses to the White Paper for consideration by Ministers.

Rifle Licences

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many licences have been granted for rifles since the commencement of the compensation scheme for handguns. [79635]

Mr. Boateng: The Firearm Certificate Statistics only differentiate firearm certificates and shotgun certificates. There is no centrally kept record of the type(s) of firearm kept on individual certificates. I can say that in the year ending 31 December 1997 (the latest year for which figures are available) 6,800 new firearm certificates were granted. This compares to an annual average of some 10,860 for the previous five years.

Firearms Compensation

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many compensation payments of what average value have been made in respect of handguns to date. [79684]

Mr. Boateng: Compensation payments averaging £334.89 have been made in respect of 114,195 guns surrendered under Options A and B of the scheme for large-calibre handguns. Corresponding figures for payments under Option C of the scheme are not yet available.

Feltham Young Offenders Unit

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average amount of time per week spent in purposeful activity by young offenders, in each unit, at Feltham Young Offenders Unit, in each of the last three years. [80020]

Mr. George Howarth: At Feltham, records of purposeful activity are not compiled by individual unit, but the figures can be broken down by sections of the population. For 1996–97 and 1997–98, figures can be provided for remand, convicted, therapeutic and new arrivals. For 1998–99, the categories are convicted, remand-short stay, health care centre and segregation/Waite (anti-bullying) Unit. Purposeful activity is defined as work (including cleaning), education, physical education and church services. The figures are shown in the table.

Average hours of purposeful activity: HMYOI Feltham

Year/Section of population	*Average purposeful activity per inmate per week (hours)*
1996–97	
Convicted	32.14
Remand	17.40
Therapeutics	28.01
Arrivals	15.12
1997–98	
Convicted	26.93
Remand	16.45
Therapeutics	20.01
Arrivals	14.66
1998–99[1]	
Units B, C, D and E (convicted)	28.94
Units F, G, Hon. and J (convicted)	14.39
Units K, O and S (rem/Short stay)	16.64
Units L, M and N (rem/short stay)	10.36
Units P, Q and R (rem/short stay)	23.34
Health care centre	7.85
Segregation/Waite Unit	6.39

[1] Up to and including February 1999

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on conditions at Feltham Young Offenders Unit. [79882]

Mr. George Howarth: There has not been a marked decline in conditions at Feltham as suggested in the recent report by the Chief Inspector of Prisons. It is accepted that progress has been slow in improving conditions in some areas, although there have been many improvements since the Chief Inspector's last visit. The general cleanliness of the establishment can and will be improved, but there is a problem in only a minority of areas within the prison. New cleaning schedules and arrangements for inspection have now been introduced to ensure that cleaning takes place.

The problems experienced at Feltham are due mainly to the population pressures being experienced across the prison estate and the industrial relations climate at Feltham. There have also been difficulties in recruiting staff. Remedial action is being taken in an attempt to improve recruitment at Feltham, and hence regime provision. Ten new officers are due to start training in April.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average amount of time per day that young offenders were locked in their cells, in each unit, at Feltham Young Offenders Unit, in each of the last three years. [80019]

Mr. George Howarth: The Prison Service records time out of cell for purposeful activity (work, education and church services) and association. There is no record of other absences from cells, for example for meals, visits and court appearances.

At Feltham, records of time out of cell are not compiled by individual unit, but the figures can be broken down by sections of the population. For 1996–97 and 1997–98, figures can be provided for remand, convicted, therapeutic and new arrivals. For 1998–99, the categories are convicted, remand/short stay, health care centre and segregation/Waite (anti-bullying) Unit. The figures are shown in the table.

Average time out of cell: HMYOI Feltham

Year	*Section of population*	*Average time out of cell per inmate per week (hours)*
1996–97	Convicted	52.87
	Remand	42.76
	Therapeutics	46.16
	Arrivals	29.08
1997–98	Convicted	47.06
	Remand	45.57
	Therapeutics	38.53
	Arrivals	29.56
1998–99[1]	Units B, C, D, and E, (convicted)	42.75
	Units F, G, H, and J, (convicted)	24.51
	Units K, O, and S, (rem/short stay)	44.00
	Units L, M, and N, (rem/short stay)	19.54
	Units P, Q, and R, (rem/short stay)	30.57
	Health care centre	9.07
	Segregation/Waite Unit	11.55

[1] Up to and including February 1999
[2] Sample figure for week 49; average figure unavailable

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take following the publication of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons' report on Feltham Young Offenders Unit; and if he will make a statement. [79881]

Mr. George Howarth: On receipt of the Chief Inspector's report, the Director General of the Prison Service established a taskforce to remedy the shortcomings which had been identified. The taskforce, led by a senior governor, has charted a plan for improvement which will be implemented over the next six months.

Already, additional finance has been allocated for urgent capital spending, and major refurbishment work will start in the next financial year. More immediate improvements to cleaning schedules and mattress and

blanket provision are already in hand, and additional work and education for approximately 80 prisoners will be brought on stream in the summer.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by Treaty Article, those elements of the Amsterdam Treaty in which, during the EU's Justice and Home Affairs Council of 12 March, he indicated a willingness to participate. [80150]

Kate Hoey: At the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 12 March, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary indicated that the United Kingdom was interested in developing co-operation with European Union partners on asylum and civil judicial co-operation, as well as in immigration policy and co-operation against illegal immigration. Such co-operation would be subject to the conditions laid down in the Protocol on the Position of the United Kingdom and Ireland and would take place only where there was no conflict with the maintenance of our frontier controls. The relevant Articles are Articles 61 to 69 of Title IV of the Treaty establishing the European Community, as amended by the Treaty of Amsterdam.

My right hon. Friend also indicated the United Kingdom's intention to continue to play a full role in law enforcement and criminal judicial co-operation and, in accordance with the Protocol integrating the Schengen acquis into the framework of the European Union, to seek participation in the Schengen acquis in the areas of police and criminal judicial co-operation, including the Schengen Information System. The legal basis for the Schengen acquis within the European Union Treaties has not yet been decided but the areas of police and criminal judicial co-operation are broadly covered by Articles 29–42 of the Treaty on European Union, as amended by the Treaty of Amsterdam.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the reduction in the number of animals required for procedures, for the last year for which figures are available, as a result of the use of alternatives to animal testing. [80097]

Mr. George Howarth: It is not possible to make such an estimate primarily because the use of non-animal tests is not regulated under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and we are not, therefore, in a position to collect data on the use of these alternatives.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ban the LD50 animal test. [80136]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 3 December 1998, *Official Report*, column *110*.

Whilst we await the deletion of the LD50 test from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's guidelines, we will authorise the LD50 test only where the applicant can demonstrate a regulatory requirement to use this test rather than an alternative.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on how many occasions have the non-animal alternative skin corrosivity tests been used for the purposes of testing household products since their validation by the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods in 1997; [80133]

(2) on how many occasions has the non-animal alternative photoirritation test been used for the purposes of testing household products since their validation in 1997. [80134]

Mr. George Howarth: The use of non-animal tests is not regulated under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and we are not, therefore, in a position to collect data on the use of these alternatives.

The use of animals in such tests will be allowed only if the applicant can demonstrate a regulatory requirement to use the animal test rather than an alternative.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the definition of household product used by his Department for the purposes of the statistics relating to scientific procedures on living animals. [80135]

Mr. George Howarth: There is no definition of household product in United Kingdom law or European Directives. The only formal guidance given to licence holders in collating figures for the annual statistics is that contained in the notes accompanying the annual "Return of procedures by project" form (published as Appendix C to the "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals", Great Britain, 1997). This instructs licence holders to use a particular code to record procedures carried out for a toxicological or other safety-related purpose (including efficacy, quality control, or other regulatory purpose) for substances "used in the household".

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of the animal tests to judge the safety of household products, listed in Table 10a of the Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals in Great Britain 1997 were *(a)* photoirritation tests, *(b)* skin corrosivity tests, *(c)* LD50 tests and *(d)* fixed-dose procedure tests; and on which species of animal these tests were carried out in 1997; [80130]

(2) on how many occasions in 1997 fixed-dose procedure tests on animals were used as replacements for LD50 tests *(a)* for household products and *(b)* otherwise. [80131]

Mr. George Howarth: The information collected during the annual statistics collection exercise cannot be broken down in this way. For example: LD50, fixed-dose procedure and other tests can be returned as acute quantitative lethal toxicity tests. Similarly, photoirritation and skin corrosivity tests might be recorded under either tests for skin irritation or tests for skin sensitisation.

Although the United Kingdom already demands a level of statistical reporting beyond the requirements of the European Directive 86/609 and European Convention ETS123 (and beyond that required by other member states), the figures for 1999, to be published in 2000, will be further refined to distinguish LD50 tests from other acute quantitative lethal toxicity tests.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the animal tests for household products were for *(a)* finished household products and *(b)* ingredients for household products, in 1997. [80132]

Mr. George Howarth: In returning data for the annual statistics on animal use, licensees are not required to distinguish between finished household product testing and the testing of ingredients intended for household products.

The Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals for 1997 show that 2,026 procedures were carried out for the testing of "substances used in the household" (both ingredients and finished products) for toxicology or other safety/efficacy evaluation.

Ethnic Minority Police (Hammersmith and Fulham)

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many ethnic minority police officers are currently stationed at *(a)* Hammersmith and *(b)* Fulham police stations. [79871]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police tells me that as at 31 March 1999 there were 11 ethnic minority police officers stationed at Hammersmith Police Station and 6 at Fulham Police Station.

Stop and Search (Hammersmith and Fulham)

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of stop and search were recorded for *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998 by (i) Hammersmith and (ii) Fulham police stations; and how many of these led to arrest for each of the years. [79873]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police has provided the following information:

	1997	*1998*
(i) Hammersmith division		
Stop and searches	4,332	5,552
Arrests resulting	560	656
(ii) Fulham division		
Stop and searches	3,030	3,661
Arrests resulting	280	337

Note:
Figures are for calendar year

Racial Crime (Hammersmith and Fulham)

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racially motivated assaults were recorded for *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998 by (i) Hammersmith and (ii) Fulham police stations. [79872]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police tells me that in the calendar year 1997 there were 6 racially motivated assaults recorded in Hammersmith Division and 4 in Fulham Division. In the calendar year 1998, 53 racially motivated assaults were recorded in Hammersmith Division and 22 in Fulham Division.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of incitement to racial hatred were *(a)* reported, *(b)* investigated and *(c)* the subject of arrest in (i) Hammersmith and (ii) Fulham police stations in (1) 1997 and (2) 1998. [79874]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police has provided the following information about cases of incitement to racial hatred:

Year	*Reported*	*Investigated*	*Arrested*
(i) Hammersmith Division			
1997	50	50	9
1998	159	159	52
(ii) Fulham Division			
1997	24	24	0
1998	106	106	6

Note:
Figures are for calendar year

Coroners

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many coroners are *(a)* women, *(b)* from ethnic minorities, *(c)* medical practitioners or former medical practitioners, *(d)* solicitors or former solicitors and *(e)* barristers or former barristers; how many coroners there are in total; and if he will make a statement. [79802]

Mr. George Howarth: According to the latest available information, there are some 137 coroners, of whom seven are women, and 15 are, or have been, medical practitioners. No information is held centrally either on the number of appointments from within the ethnic minority communities or on the number of coroners who are by origin solicitors or barristers.

Mr. John Kamara

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long the Criminal Cases Review Commission has been considering the case of Mr. John Kamara. [80155]

Kate Hoey: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave her on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *124*.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps the Criminal Cases Review Commission has taken to make progress on the case of Mr. John Kamara since 22 February; [80154]

(2) when the Criminal Cases Review Commission expects to make a decision on whether to refer the case of Mr. John Kamara to the Court of Appeal. [80153]

Kate Hoey: I understand from the Criminal Cases Review Commission that the consideration of Mr. Kamara's case by a committee of three Commission members, which was due to take place last month, has had to be postponed until later this month for operational reasons. The case committee may decide either whether or not to refer the case to the Court of Appeal or that further investigation is required.

Rape Crisis Centres

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide financial support to *(a)* rape crisis centres and *(b)* women's refuges in the UK. [79900]

Mr. Boateng: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) on 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *601–02*.

Prisoners (Diseases)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes have taken place in the past 10 years in the proportion of prisoners suffering from *(a)* hepatitis, *(b)* HIV/AIDS and *(c)* TB. [80250]

Mr. George Howarth: Complete information is not available in the form requested. The information given in the table has been collated from a number of databases held centrally, based on returns from prison establishments. The table shows new cases of hepatitis B and tuberculosis in England and Wales for 1988–89 and 1997–98.

New cases of hepatitis B and tuberculosis in prisons (England and Wales) 1988–89 and 1997–98

	1988–89	*1997–98*
Hepatitis B (acute/chronic)	347	246
Average daily population of prison	49,784	62,584
Proportion of population	0.70%	0.39%
Tuberculosis	22	50
Average daily population of prison	49,784	62,584
Proportion of population	0.0442%	0.0799%

Note:
Arrangements for the collection of data on HIV/AIDS varied during the period. No statistics are provided since valid comparisons would be very difficult to make.

Needle Exchanges (Prisons)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to allow needle exchanges in prison. [80249]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 17 December 1998, *Official Report*, column *728*.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review homicide law as it relates to victims of domestic violence who kill partners who have abused them. [80183]

Mr. Boateng: No. The law on murder can already respond with flexibility to the particular circumstances of domestic violence victims. Self-defence is a complete defence to a charge of murder which if successful, results in the acquittal of the defendant. Provocation is a partial defence to murder, which reduces the offence to manslaughter. The other partial defence to murder, that of diminished responsibility, is also successfully pleaded in some domestic homicide cases. In such cases, the onus is on the prosecution to prove beyond all reasonable doubt the absence of, for example, provocation or self-defence on the part of the defendant.

Prison Deaths (Notification)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *31*, on Prison Deaths (Notification), if the Follow Up To Deaths In Custody document includes (i) guidance on the timescale and (ii) a maximum delay for the notification of relatives following the death of a patient in hospital. [80565]

Mr. George Howarth: Next of kin should be notified as soon as possible following a death in prison custody. Because individual circumstances may differ, the Prison Service Order does not set minimum or maximum timescales. The same principles apply if a prisoner dies in an outside hospital.

British Summer Time

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining British Summer Time throughout the year. [79921]

Mr. George Howarth: The issues remain very much as set out in the previous Government's 1989 Green Paper "Summer Time—A Consultation Document". The responses revealed marked divergences of opinion. We will continue to listen to all sides of the argument, but have no current plans to publish a fresh analysis or to propose changing the present summer time arrangements.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the effect on *(a)* the number of accidents and *(b)* mortality rates if British Summer Time were to be maintained throughout the year. [79922]

Mr. George Howarth: I periodically receive representations from hon. Members, members of the public and interests groups in favour of continuous British summer time or Central European Time. They generally argue that lighter evenings would reduce road deaths and injuries overall.

Liverpool Nationality Office

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter of 3 February from the hon. Member for Aylesbury concerning his constituents Mr. and Mrs. Sutton and the Liverpool Nationality Office. [79837]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I sent a reply to the hon. Member on 7 April. I regret the delay in responding.

Schengen Agreement

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *299*, if he has requested UK participation in aspects of the Schengen Agreement under Article 4 of the Protocol. [80108]

Kate Hoey: A formal application for participation under Article 4 of the Protocol integrating the Schengen acquis into the framework of the European Union can be made only once the Treaty of Amsterdam comes into force.

Charity Fund-Raising

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has for tighter regulation of charity fund-raising; and if he will make a statement; [80185]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Charity Commissioners regarding bogus fund-raisers; and if he will make a statement; [80186]

(3) if he will seek to provide the police with powers to confiscate takings from bogus charity collectors. [80187]

Mr. Boateng: The Home Office works closely with the Charity Commission and all Government Departments on matters relating to the charitable sector.

The police already have the power to seize anything that is evidence of an offence. The decision on whether such property should be confiscated is a matter for the courts under section 71 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and section 43 of the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973.

Under the Charities Act 1993 the Charity Commission can investigate when it appears that funds raised on charitable trusts may be at risk. The Commission can, and does, freeze bank accounts and appoint new trustees where this is necessary.

The Commission also works closely with the police and local authorities to ensure, as far as possible, that money donated by members of the public is used for the purposes intended by the donors. It also seeks to raise the public's awareness of the problems posed by bogus fund-raising, and gives advice on how people may donate safely. Prosecutions are a matter for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Part II of the Charities Act 1992, which came into effect on 1 March 1995, contains important controls in relation to professional and commercial involvement in charitable fund-raising. Part III of the Act, which has yet to be brought into force, seeks to rationalise the provisions for the licensing of street collections and house to house collections currently contained in the Police, Factories Etc (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1916 and the House to House Collections Act 1939. Consideration is currently being given to the implementation of Part III.

Child Abuse

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many successful prosecutions have been achieved in cases of child abuse in respect of children aged (i) zero to four years, (ii) four to six years and (iii) six to 10 years, in each of the last five years. [80087]

Mr. Boateng: Those who abuse children can be charged with a number of offences. However, some of these offences, such as assault causing actual bodily harm and common assault, are mostly used to prosecute those who attack and injure adults and it is not possible to identify child victims from the overall statistics. The table shows the statistics for those offences where it is possible to identify a child victim. No further age breakdown is available centrally.

Defendants prosecuted at magistrates' courts and convicted[1] at all courts for violent offences against children, 1993–97
England and Wales

Number of persons

Offences	*Prosecutions* 1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Indictable Offences					
Violence against the person					
Murder of Infant under 1 year of age	12	10	11	15	14
Infanticide	2	1	1	1	—
Child destruction	—	1	1	—	—
Cruelty to, or neglect of children	380	470	519	505	608
Abandoning children under 2 years	2	4	12	3	1
Child abduction	69	82	98	89	77
Concealment of Birth	4	3	—	2	
Sexual offences					
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	294	345	125	16	—
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	15	21	6	3	—
Buggery by a male of a male under 16[2]	[2]	[2]	48	66	107
Buggery by a male with a female under 16[2]	[2]	[2]	25	26	35
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	432	449	400	325	373
Gross indecency by a male aged 21 or over with a male aged under 18[2]	[2]	[2]	10	9	30
Gross indecency by a male aged 18–20 with a male aged under 18[2]	[2]	[2]	—	1	3
Rape of a female aged under 16[2]	[2]	[2]	336	477	592
Rape of a male aged under 16[2]	[2]	[2]	18	20	45
Attempted rape of a female aged under 16[2]	[2]	[2]	32	44	74
Attempted rape of a male aged under 16[2]	[2]	[2]	—	4	5
Indecent assault on a female under 16	1,896	2,036	1,797	1,604	1,639
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	97	88	77	40	40
Incest with a girl under 13	52	41	22	26	14
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	2	5	3	2	7
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	8	—	4	4	3
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution etc.	—	1	—	2	—
Male aged 21 or over procuring or attempting to procure a male under 18 of gross indecency with another male[1]	[2]	[2]	1	—	6
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	13	27	11	9	6
Gross indecency with boys aged 14 and under	102	87	62	61	63
Gross indecency with girls aged 14 and under	155	129	109	97	109
Summary Offences					
Violent offences					
Cruelty to or neglect of children	3	7	3	4	4

England and Wales

Number of persons

Offences	*Convictions*[1] *1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Indictable Offences					
Violence against the person					
Murder of Infant under 1 year of age	2	2	6	8	11
Infanticide	5	3	2	4	3
Child destruction	—	—	1	—	—
Cruelty to, or neglect of children	209	238	317	293	390
Abandoning children under 2 years	1	1	7	—	1
Child abduction	32	36	66	52	40
Concealment of Birth	2	1	—	—	1
Sexual offences					
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	136	135	86	5	—
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	20	16	14	2	—
Buggery by a male of a male under 16[2]	[6] —	[6] —	29	66	70
Buggery by a male with a female under 16[2]	[6] —	[6] —	7	17	21
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	293	324	339	355	363
Gross indecency by a male aged 21 or over with a male aged under 18[3]	[6] —	[6] —	11	11	17
Gross indecency by a male aged 18–20 with a male aged under 18[3]	[6] —	[6] —	—	—	2
Rape of a female aged under 16[4]	[6] —	[6] —	113	210	198
Rape of a male aged under 16[4]	[6] —	[6] —	2	13	24
Attempted rape of a female aged under 16[4]	[6] —	[6] —	21	35	52
Attempted rape of a male aged under 16[4]	[6] —	[6] —	2	2	5
Indecent assault on a female under 16	1,205	1,355	1,446	1,597	1,627
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	76	64	81	54	44
Incest with a girl under 13	51	35	21	19	19
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	2	4	5	—	3
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	6	2	3	—	1
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution etc.	1	—	3	1	1
Male aged 21 or over procuring or attempting to procure a male under 18 of gross indecency with another male[3]	[6] —	[6] —	2	3	6
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	6	9	6	3	1
Gross indecency with boys aged 14 and under	80	77	56	53	56
Gross indecency with girls aged 14 and under	123	112	99	109	111
Summary Offences					
Violent offences					
Cruelty to or neglect of children	2	2	3	3	1

[1] Includes persons proceeded against in earlier years or for other offences.
[2] Buggery and attempted buggery offences under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 Section 12 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Section 143.
[3] Indecency between males offences under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 Section 12 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Section 144.
[4] Rape and attempted rape offences under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 Section 1 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Section 142.
[6] Not available.

Public Gatherings (Parliament Square)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the procedures governing the granting of permission for public gatherings in Parliament Square. [79167]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its Chief Executive, David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Viviane Robertson to Mr. Peter Ainsworth, dated 13 April 1999:

In the absence of the Chief Executive, Mr. David Welch, I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to answer your Parliamentary Question about public gatherings on Parliament Square because this is a subject for which the Royal Parks Agency is responsible.

We rarely give permission for public gatherings in Parliament Square at any time, and particularly while Parliament is sitting, when Sessional Orders require the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to keep the roads leading to the House open.

Although the Agency is responsible for the management of Parliament Square, we are not responsible for the roads that surround it. Consequently, on the rare occasions we do receive such a request, we consult the Parliamentary authorities and the Metropolitan Police before deciding whether to approve the gathering.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Renewable Energy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what plans the Committee has for arranging for power to be obtained for the House from renewable energy sources. [80001]

Sir Sydney Chapman: Power for the House is purchased in the competitive market on the basis of lowest price and at present we have no plans to change this policy. Energy can be obtained from renewable sources at a premium price, depending on the source.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Death Penalty (Commonwealth Countries)

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Council how many cases are currently under consideration by the Privy Council concerning the possible use of the death penalty in Commonwealth countries. [80025]

Mrs. Beckett: Thirteen appeals and a further 15 applications for leave to appeal in capital cases from Commonwealth countries are currently registered with the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Judgment has yet to be given in two capital appeals already heard by the Committee.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the President of the Council if she will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* she, *(b)* her officials, *(c)* her advisers and *(d)* her PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79643]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*.

The requirements of the Ministerial Code also apply to Parliamentary Private Secretaries when attending meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates' courts in England and Wales still in use are over 100 years old; and if he will make a statement. [79697]

Mr. Hoon: The magistrates courts of England and Wales are a locally managed service in accordance with the provisions of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997. Buildings, that house magistrates courts are owned or leased by local authorities. The information requested is not collected centrally. It may be provided only at disproportionate cost by contacting each local authority.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79645]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*. The requirements of the Ministerial Code also apply to Parliamentary Private Secretaries when attending meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79631]

Mr. Hoon: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions "Policy Appraisal and the Environment: Policy Guidance" leaflet has been circulated (in May 1998) to all senior officials with policy responsibilities with an instruction that environmental appraisals are to be carried out on all new policies and programmes likely to have a significant impact on the environment. The policies currently under consideration have no environmental impact.

Judges

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many judges have been subjected to *(a)* formal and *(b)* informal sanctions for breaches of the rules restricting commercial and non-commercial activities in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement; [79797]

(2) what *(a)* formal and *(b)* informal sanctions may be applied in the event of a judge breaching the rules or the restrictions relating to commercial and non-commercial activities; and if he will make a statement; [79798]

(3) what plans he has to review the sanctions available in the case of a judge breaching the rules restricting commercial and non-commercial activities. [79799]

Mr. Hoon: If the Lord Chancellor believed that there was legitimate cause for concern about a judge's commercial or non-commercial activities, he would consider on an individual basis what action, if any, he might take. The only statutory sanction applicable to holders of full-time judicial office up to the level of Circuit Judge is removal from office, for misbehaviour serious enough to justify that course of action. If the Lord Chancellor had reason to believe that a judge had participated in activities which might be incompatible with judicial office, he would take account of the judge's comments before considering what further action, if any, was necessary. No holders of judicial office have been removed from office for reasons connected to their commercial or non-commercial activities within the last 3 years. Information is not available on the number of occasions on which informal clarification of the position on commercial or non-commercial activities may have been sought. The Lord Chancellor has no plans to review these arrangements.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps are taken on the appointment of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time judges to bring to their attention the rules relating to the restrictions on commercial and non-commercial activities; and if he will make a statement. [79793]

Mr. Hoon: All full-time judges are provided on appointment with documentation which includes guidance on outside activities and incorporates advice on the rule that no full-time judge should hold a commercial directorship. All holders of judicial office are able to consult either the Lord Chancellor or other senior members of the judiciary if they have any doubts about the application of the guidance in particular circumstances. These provisions do not apply to part-time judges.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the restrictions on the commercial and non-commercial activities of judges; and if he will make a statement. [79796]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor is satisfied in principle with the present provisions relating to activities considered incompatible with judicial office, which are of long standing, but he has decided to review the precise terms of the guidance issued to new appointees on these provisions so as to make sure they are both clear and up-to-date. These provisions are, of course, separate from any question of conflict of interest arising in individual cases, on which all holders of judicial office are expected to comply with the existing case law.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time judges have (i) non-commercial and (ii) commercial company directorships. [79800]

Mr. Hoon: This information is not collected. The information may be held in respect of those individual members of the judiciary who have volunteered the information to the Lord Chancellor's Department, but it is not possible to identify all such individuals from the Department's records without incurring disproportionate costs. All full-time judges receive on appointment guidance which advises them that they should not hold commercial directorships.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department in what circumstances a High Court Judge is permitted to conduct personal *(a)* social and *(b)* commercial meetings within the Royal Courts of Justice. [79801]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor expects judges to exercise personal responsibility for the use which is made of their chambers in the Royal Courts of Justice, having regard to the interests of the taxpayer. Chambers are made available to judges as an aid to the performance of their judicial duties, but it would be unobjectionable for them, in their discretion, to make occasional use of them for social or personal purposes not inconsistent with the performance of those duties and having due regard to the interests of the taxpayer.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what restrictions apply to *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time judges in respect of (i) holding company directorships, (ii) holding shares in private limited companies, (iii) holding shares in public limited companies, (iv) being members of barristers' chambers, (v) being members of solicitors' partnerships, (vi) being members of commercial partnerships and (vii) having other commercial interests; and if he will make a statement. [79804]

Mr. Hoon: Holders of full-time judicial office are prohibited, under section 75 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990, from practising as barristers or solicitors and from being indirectly concerned in any such practice. They are also advised on appointment that they should discontinue any professional or business links with their former chambers or firm. In addition, full-time judges are advised that they should not hold commercial directorships. There is no objection to judges holding shares in either a private or a public limited company, and there is normally no objection to taking part in the management of a family estate or farming their own land. The extent to which other commercial interests would be subject to the same constraint as applies to commercial directorships would depend on the individual circumstances, but a commercial partnership would normally be treated similarly. These various provisions do not apply to holders of part-time judicial office. However, all holders of judicial office are advised to refrain from participating in any activity which might conflict with judicial office. In addition, all holders of judicial office must have regard to the case law governing conflicts of interest, which will apply in any individual case in which the possibility arises of a conflict between the judge's private interests and those of any person or party involved in the case.

Social Security Commissioners

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many social security commissioners are *(a)* women, *(b)* from ethnic minorities, *(c)* solicitors or former solicitors and *(d)* barristers or former barristers; what is the total number of commissioners; and if he will make a statement. [79792]

Mr. Hoon: There are a total of 46 Social Security Commissioners in post. The breakdown is as follows: 12 are female and 34 are male; 26 are barristers (or former barristers); 16 are solicitors (or former solicitors); and the remaining 4 are neither barristers nor solicitors. So far as an ethnic breakdown is concerned, to enable the Lord Chancellor to monitor the effectiveness of policies designed to attract more members of the ethnic community to apply for judicial appointment, candidates are requested to indicate their ethnic origin on their application. This is a recent introduction to the appointment process and candidates are not compelled to answer. Therefore, from records currently held I cannot provide an ethnic breakdown. I do not propose to make a statement.

Employment Tribunals (Chairmen)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time chairmen of employment tribunals are (i) women, (ii) from ethnic minorities, (iii) solicitors or former solicitors and (iv) barristers or former barristers; and what is the total number of (1) full-time and (2) part-time chairmen in post. [79784]

Mr. Hoon: There are a total of 84 full-time Chairmen of Employment Tribunals in post. The breakdown is as follows: 71 are male, of which 28 are former barristers and 43 are former solicitors; and 13 are female, of which 6 are former barristers and 7 are former solicitors. There are a total of 204 part-time Chairmen of Employment Tribunals in post. The breakdown is as follows: 170 are male, of which 47 are barristers (or former barristers) and

123 are solicitors (or former solicitors); and 33 are female, of which 9 are barristers (or former barristers) and 24 are solicitors (or former solicitors).

So far as an ethnic breakdown is concerned, to enable the Lord Chancellor to monitor the effectiveness of policies designed to attract more members of the ethnic community to apply for judicial appointment, candidates are requested to indicate their ethnic origin on their application. This is a recent introduction to the appointment process and candidates are not compelled to answer. Therefore, full and detailed records are not available. However, from records that are available, I can indicate that, of the 84 full-time Chairmen, one is Asian, 29 are White and three are West Indian. Of the 204 part-time Chairmen, 22 are White and three are West Indian.

Judicial Appointments

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to extend the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and Race Relations Act 1976 to the appointments procedures for *(a)* QCs and *(b)* judges; and if he will make a statement. [79795]

Mr. Hoon: The Government are currently considering proposals for changes to the Sex Discrimination and Race Relations legislation, including whether these might have any implications for judicial appointments and appointments as Queen's Counsel.

Public Record Office Files

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will place copies of the following Public Record Office files in the Library, *(a)* group LAB, class 10, piece number 2539, *(b)* group FS, class 24, piece number 19, *(c)* group FS, class 27, piece number 486, *(d)* group LAB, class 10, piece number 3106, *(e)* group LAB, class 10, piece number 3150 and *(f)* group LAB, class 10, piece number 1715. [80440]

Mr. Hoon: The Public Record Office will supply copies of the files to the Library on payment of the copying fees prescribed by The Public Record Office (Fees) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999/691). The files themselves may be consulted free of charge at the Public Record Office.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the parliamentary constituencies which he has visited in an official capacity in the past 12 months. [71334]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 15 February 1999]:* I have carried out official engagements as Foreign Secretary at venues in the following constituencies:

Edinburgh, Central
Birmingham, Ladywood
Cardiff, Central
Cotswold
Hayes and Harlington
Grantham and Stamford.

Departmental Budget

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was his Department's budget in cash terms and at 1998–99 prices for the years *(a)* 1992–93 to 1998–99 and *(b)* his estimate for 1999–2000 to 2001–02. [77335]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 22 March 1999]:* For the years 1993–94 onwards, I refer the hon. Member to the 1999 Foreign and Commonwealth Office Departmental Report, pages 4 and 5. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. The figures for 1992–93, adjusted according to the same deflators as the figures in the Departmental Report, are:

Total FCO budget (£m)	*Cash terms*	*Real terms (1998–99 prices)*
1992–93	1,242	1,441

GCHQ

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of potential interference to GCHQ transmissions from the development of technology to deliver high-speed internet connections via powerlines; and if he will make a statement. [78869]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Radiocommunications Agency has advised that any system providing high-speed internet access through mains electricity wiring has the potential to cause radio frequency interference. This means that any proposed system would need rigorous trials in order to avoid risk to the national user interest.

Strategic Export Controls (Annual Report)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to include contributions from the Secretary of State for International Development in future strategic export controls annual reports. [79712]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Department for International Development will continue to be fully consulted in line with its policy responsibilities on the format and content of future reports on strategic export controls.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79649]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*.

The requirements of the Ministerial Code also apply to Parliamentary Private Secretaries when attending any meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

Greece

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what cultural exchange programmes he is currently planning with the Greek Government; and if he will make a statement. [79696]

Mr. Fatchett: The cultural exchange programme agreed with the Greek Government in 1998 provides a framework for the full range of artistic and cultural activity. We enjoy a dynamic bilateral partnership. For example, the next few months will see tours of Greece by British theatre and dance companies, and exhibitions and premieres of visual arts and music by Greek artists in the UK. Many of these events follow on from the "Britain and Greece" Festival in November and December 1998, devised and delivered by the British Council in Greece, and promoted by the British Embassy. The cultural components of this Festival included concerts, theatre, lectures, exhibitions, films and conferences. The Greek Prime Minister and other Government Ministers attended several events. Media coverage was strong, including 216 press articles on individual events and 70 on the general Festival, and 89 TV mentions across 7 channels.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide details of the equipment to be provided by the United Kingdom to ECOMOG, as part of the United Kingdom's £10 million package of assistance to Sierra Leone; and what assurances he has received about its use. [80720]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We continue to believe that lasting peace in Sierra Leone cannot be achieved by military means alone. But for a negotiated solution to be achieved, the people and Government of Sierra Leone must be secure.

On 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *567*, I announced that £5 million of the UK's new £10 million package of assistance for Sierra Leone would be made available to provide further equipment for ECOMOG; and that deliveries of equipment would be arriving shortly. This is to support ECOMOG's efforts to protect the people and the democratically elected Government of Sierra Leone. As part of our package of assistance to ECOMOG, we are providing logistic support in the form of vehicles, boots and rations, as well as light weapons and ammunition.

We have secured assurances from ECOMOG that this equipment will be used only in accordance with internationally acceptable human rights standards and humanitarian law. We have made it clear to ECOMOG that our support is conditional on ECOMOG and the Government of Sierra Leone respecting human rights.

In accordance with normal practice, we will notify the United Nations Sanctions Committee once we have precise details of the consignments. We have received assurances from ECOMOG and the Government of Sierra Leone that the equipment will remain in Sierra Leone when ECOMOG eventually departs.

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to publish the Government's response to the Foreign Affairs Committee report on Sierra Leone (HC 116 of Session 1998–99). [80721]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Government's response will be published today.

Human Rights (China)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the position of the Government at the meeting of the UN Commission for Human Rights on 22 March in respect of China. [79663]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *301*.

Senator Pinochet

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Head of the Latin America and Caribbean Department plans to reply to the request by the Chilean Ambassador for assistance in obtaining return passage to Chile for Senator Pinochet. [80163]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are not aware of any such outstanding request.

Military Intervention

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria are applied by Her Majesty's Government in respect of any decision to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of sovereign states. [80266]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Any decision to use military force will take into account all the circumstances at the time and comply with international law.

Iraq

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the Government's written submissions to the three United Nations panels on Iraq. [80514]

Mr. Fatchett: HMG were not invited to submit a written paper to the panel considering disarmament issues and did not do so. A UK paper on proposals for improving the humanitarian situation in Iraq was passed to the panel on humanitarian issues and shared with Security Council colleagues. A copy has been placed in the Library. The former UK representative to the Tripartite Commission gave an oral presentation to the panel concerned with the Kuwaiti missing and with property.

East Timor

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had recently with the Indonesian Government regarding their proposal to grant independence to East Timor. [80112]

Mr. Fatchett: We stay in regular touch with the Indonesian Government. This was one of the issues I discussed with Indonesian Foreign Minister Alatas at the ASEM Foreign Ministers meeting in Berlin on 29 March and with President Habibie's foreign affairs adviser who called on me on 30 March.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indonesian Government about the activities of *(a)* the ABRI, *(b)* the Village Police and *(c)* the paramilitary militia in East Timor. [80113]

Mr. Fatchett: We are very concerned at the deteriorating security situation in East Timor. We have called for restraint on all sides and for the leadership of ABRI to disarm and curb the activities of militias. We have made out position clear to the Indonesian Government.

Visitors Visas

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for visit visas for people travelling from India were received by the New Dehli Embassy between January and December 1998; and how many were refused. [80058]

Mr. Fatchett: The British High Commission in New Delhi received 56,184 applications for visit visas during 1998, of which 7,680 were refused.

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for visit visas for people travelling from *(a)* Poland, *(b)* Russia, *(c)* Ukraine and *(d)* Latvia have been received by the relevant British embassies between January and December 1998; and how many were refused. [79925]

Mr. Fatchett: The statistics requested are as follows:

Visit visa applications 1998

Country	*Received*	*Refused*
Poland	881	105
Russia	92,679	2,772
Ukraine	23,366	2,567
Latvia	2,440	169

Citizens of Poland and Latvia are not visa nationals and not, therefore, required to apply for entry clearance for visits to the UK.

French Immigration

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens have been detained for interview by French immigration officials whilst travelling to the United Kingdom between January 1998 and February 1999. [79924]

Mr. Fatchett: We are unable to provide figures for the number of British nationals detained for interview by the French immigration police. Under the terms of the 1951 Consular Convention between the United Kingdom and France, the French authorities must inform British Consular services when a British national has been arrested or detained in custody in France. They are not required to inform consulates when British nationals are detained for interview by French immigration police.

Slovakia

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Slovakia regarding the United Kingdom's recent introduction of visa requirements for Slovak visitors to the UK. [80057]

Ms Quin: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) on 15 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *512*. I last discussed this issue when I met the Slovak Foreign Minister on 27 January.

Private Military Companies

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when revised guidance will be issued to his Department's officials on contacts with private military companies. [80393]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I am pleased to inform my right hon. Friend that revised guidance, prepared in consultation with other Departments, was issued on 13 April. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House. The Ministry of Defence is issuing parallel guidance.

Milan Speech

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will deposit in the Library a copy of his speech made at Milan on 2 March. [79938]

Ms Quin: The visit to Milan by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was cancelled.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if power supplies on St Helena are secure; and if he will make a statement. [80639]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The current electricity generating capacity on St. Helena can cope with existing demand.

The provision of any further generating capacity that may be needed in the future will be considered as part of the public sector investment programme within the aid framework.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each of his departmental responsibilities arising from the implementation of the Treaty of Amsterdam and the relevant sections of that Treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80405]

Ms Quin: We do not expect implementation of the Treaty of Amsterdam to add significantly to this Department's responsibilities.

DEFENCE

Defence Agencies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the *(a)* Defence Analytical Services Agency, *(b)* Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency, *(c)* Defence Intelligence and Security Centre, *(d)* Army

Base Storage and Distribution Agency, *(e)* Defence Vetting Agency and *(f)* Defence Estate Organisation published their reports for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of their reports. [72797]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executives of the Agencies concerned. I have asked them to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 13 April 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State, in which you asked on what date the Defence Analytical Services Agency published their report for 1997–98 and at what cost. As Chief Executive of DASA this falls within my area of responsibility.

We published our Annual Report and Accounts on 29th July 1998 at a cost of £4,552.00.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Letter from M. J. Roycroft to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 13 April 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State about the date on which the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency published its report for 1997–98 and the cost of production of the report, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency.

The report was published in October at a cost of £10,726.25.

Letter from C. G. Holtom to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 13 April 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about Agency Reports as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as the Chief Executive of the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre Agency.

The Defence Intelligence and Security Centre did not publish an Annual Report and Accounts for financial year 1997/98. The Agency is planning to publish its first Annual Report and Accounts later this year.

Letter from P. D. Foxton to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 13 April 1999:

I refer to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about what date the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA) published their reports for 1997–98 and what was the cost of production of their reports. As Chief Executive of ABSDA I am replying as this falls within my area of responsibility.

It is anticipated the ABSDA Annual Report and Accounts will be published shortly. The cost of production, which includes design and publication, is estimated to be £6,000.

Letter from Michael Wilson to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 13 April 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Defence Vetting Agency's Annual Report for 1997/1998, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Defence Vetting Agency's Annual Report for 1997/1998 was published on 17 July 1998. The cost of publication of the report was some £2,600.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from Ian C. F. Andrews to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 13 April 1999:

I am replying to your question put to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the date the Defence Estate Organisation published its report for 1997/98, and the cost of production, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Estate Organisation.

The Defence Estate Organisation's Annual Report for 1997/98 is to be finalised within the next few weeks and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House of Commons. There are no external costs associated with the production of the report, all the work being carried out in-house.

You would wish to be aware that on 29 March 1999, the DEO was re-launched as Defence Estates. It remains an Agency of the MOD.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will set targets for the *(a)* Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency and *(b)* Defence Codification Agency for 1999–2000. [72825]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* I expect to set Key Targets for the Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency by the end of April 1999. The Defence Codification Agency is currently being incorporated into the Logistics Support Services Agency (LSSA). I expect to set targets for the LSSA later this month, and these will include supporting targets for Defence Codification.

Armed Forces (Criminal Convictions)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of Her Majesty's armed forces have been convicted and sentenced in a criminal court in each of the last 10 years; how many have consequently been dismissed for misconduct; how many have remained in the armed forces under Queen's Regulations provision to take exceptional reasons into account; and if he will list the conviction and length of sentence in each case where exceptional reasons were taken into account and the nature of the exceptional reason cited. [75019]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, information relating to convictions of Service personnel by criminal courts will in future be held centrally.

Armed Forces (Textiles)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase the proportion of United Kingdom manufactured textiles used by the armed forces. [77467]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* The Ministry of Defence has a policy of international procurement whenever possible. We are however, concerned to ensure that British defence industry remains healthy and competitive in world markets, and procurement decisions are taken in the light of this. My Department's Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency currently places 76 per cent. by value of contracts for clothing for the Armed Forces with UK companies.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries of origin of the fabrics manufactured for the production of garments under his Department's contracts in each of the last five years. [79868]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My Department does not hold the information requested. The great majority of purchases of textile based products are made-up garments, and my Department does not require contractors to specify the country of origin of the textiles used to make the items. The only contractural stipulation over the

country of manufacture is that 10 per cent. of garments must be made at the main contractor's accredited facilities.

Gibraltar

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the restrictions imposed by him on British *(a)* forces, *(b)* aircraft and *(c)* vessels travelling (i) to and (ii) from Gibraltar. [78349]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My Department imposes no restrictions on the movement of UK personnel or aircraft to and from Gibraltar. The normal UK rules on dress and status apply for Service personnel travelling to, from and within Spain. RAF aircraft and RN vessels are obliged to abide by Spanish restrictions placed on movements of NATO ships and aircraft to and from Gibraltar.

Female Personnel (Dismissal for Pregnancy)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many women were dismissed from Her Majesty's forces on account of pregnancy in each of the past 10 years. [76956]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The policy of compulsorily discharging women from the Armed Forces on grounds of pregnancy ceased in August 1990. Three hundred and thirty three women were discharged from the Army and the Royal Air Force on grounds of pregnancy in 1990–91[1] and 433 from the Navy Service, Army and the Royal Air Force during 1989–90.

[1]The figures represent compulsory discharges up to 1 August 1990 and voluntary exits thereafter until March 1991. No data are available for the Naval Service for the year 1990–91.

European Court of Human Rights

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list decisions of the European Court of Human Rights over the past 10 years which relate to the responsibilities of his Department. [76954]

Mr. Doug Henderson: There have been seven judgments by the European Court of Human Rights during this period that relate to the responsibilities of my Department:

McCann and others (27 September 1995)
Findlay (25 February 1997)
Coyne (23 September 1997)
Cable and others (18 February 1999)
Hood (18 February 1999)
McGinley & Egan (9 June 1998)
LCB (9 June 1998).

Belloch Recommendation

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken on the recommendation for a single MOD Police source document for terms and conditions of service contained in paragraph 5.10 of the 1994 Belloch report into the MOD police. [78809]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Terms and Conditions of Service for the MOD Police are at an advanced stage of preparation. Chapters will be published as soon as consultation with the Defence Police Federation is completed. In due course, they will form part of the proposed MDP Policy Procedures Manual currently under preparation.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings on nuclear safety have been held with local authorities, police forces, the Home Office and fire services over the past two years; and what future meetings are planned. [79513]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* In the context of local liaison committees and multi-agency groups maintaining or exercising nuclear accident response plans, meetings broadly encompassing nuclear safety issues are regularly held with representatives of local authorities, police forces and fire services in many parts of the country and with the Home Office. They will continue to be held as required.

Territorial Army

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a list of TA units and their establishment of regular permanent staff before the TA reforms in November 1998; and if he will list proposed TA units and their proposed establishment of regular permanent staff. [79702]

Mr. Doug Henderson: As a result of our reforms of the TA, there has been a slight increase in the ratio of Permanent Staff to TA members across the TA. I have placed a copy of this list in the Library of the House.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79626]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Falklands (Flights)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the reduction in capacity in *(a)* general freight carriage and *(b)* carriage of post when Tristar flights to the Falklands are reduced. [79808]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The reduction in the number of RAF Tristar flights to the Falkland Islands from 7 to 6 per lunar month is likely to have some impact on freight capacity, but the precise details have yet to be determined. The greater payload of the improved Tristar aircraft and the take up of spare capacity on other air and sea movements should help offset any reduction in total freight capacity between the UK and Falklands. We do not expect there to be any reduction in capacity to carry mail or other high priority freight.

Lee Clegg

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the total cost to his Department of the defence of Lee Clegg, breaking down the cost under different heads. [78736]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 31 March 1999]:* The payments made by my Department to date for the defence of Lee Clegg total £1,044,401.14. This figure does not include the cost of his first trial in 1993, the costs of which were met by the Northern Ireland Office. Nor does it cover his retrial, which began in November 1998 and lasted until February 1999 for which we have so far received bills for the costs up to the end of January 1999, but these have yet to be approved for payment.

Depleted Uranium Weapons

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if depleted uranium weapons are being used by NATO in its current operations in Yugoslavia. [79859]

Mr. George Robertson: No depleted uranium based ammunition has been used by UK forces during Operation Allied Force. I cannot comment on behalf of other NATO nations.

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what scientific research was commissioned by his Department following the use of depleted uranium weapons in Iraq in 1991 to assess *(a)* the short and *(b)* the long-term effects on people and the environment; and to whom the result of the research has been made available. [79858]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Ministry of Defence has not commissioned any scientific research to investigate the health and environmental effects of using DU-based ammunition during the 1990–91 Gulf conflict. However, the potential hazards of DU are well understood and are well documented in the scientific literature. In 1993, the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency's Radiation Protection Service (then the Defence Radiological Protection Service (DRPS)) published a summary report of its assessment of the potential hazards posed by DU. The report, copies of which have already been placed in the Library of the House, explained that there are two types of hazard posed by the use of DU: a radiation hazard, although DU is a low specific activity material (as defined by the International Atomic Energy Agency); and a chemical toxicity hazard, which is similar to that posed by other heavy metals, such as lead.

DU-based ammunition is currently fired by the MOD at two ranges in the UK—Kirkcudbright in southern Scotland and Eskmeals in Cumbria—for test and evaluation purposes. In December 1993, the MOD commissioned independent environmental consultants, W. S. Atkins, to conduct a detailed review of the environmental impact of this test-firing. The consultants' resulting report, a copy of which has already been placed in the Library of the House, was published in 1995. It concluded that the radiation doses to members of the public, and the associated risks from exposure to DU released into the environment were extremely low. These conclusions were, and continue to be, substantiated by comprehensive monitoring programmes at both sites.

The Ministry of Defence is, of course, well aware of suggestions, particularly in the Press, that the use of DU-based ammunition during the Gulf conflict has caused an increase in ill-health, including deformities, cancers and birth defects, in Iraq (particularly around Basra, Az Zubayr and Um Qasr). However, we have not seen any peer-reviewed epidemiological research data which support these claims. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the illnesses of the types highlighted in Press articles are uniquely associated with exposure to DU. The Government would, of course, consider carefully any reliable medical or scientific data which may emerge concerning the incidence of ill-health in Iraq.

The Ministry of Defence is also aware of the suggested link between exposure to DU and the illnesses being experienced by some Gulf veterans. However, this is only one of a number of factors which have been suggested as causes of Gulf veterans' illnesses and, pending further medical and scientific evidence, my Department is keeping an open mind on this issue. On 19 March, I published the detailed paper "Testing for the presence of depleted uranium in UK veterans of the Gulf conflict: The Current Position". The paper, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House, describes the scenarios in which UK troops may have been exposed to DU in the Gulf and the possible health effects of such exposures.

Frigates

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what humanitarian roles are being included in the staff target for the future escort planned to replace the Type 23 frigates. [80205]

Mr. Spellar: The Staff Target for the Future Surface Combatant, FSC, formerly the Future Escort, is due to be approved in Autumn 1999. It will be derived from the Concept of Operations which is currently being prepared and includes Peace Support and Humanitarian Operations as one of the vessels' Defence Missions.

Antonov 124–100s (Chartering)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times the RAF has hired or leased Antonov 124–100s in each of the last 10 years. [80470]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The RAF has chartered an Antonov 124–100 on the following number of occasions.

1996—14

1997—10

1998—16.

Records are not held for any charter prior to 1996.

Centre for Defence Medicine

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the members of the Committee which is considering the statement of requirement for a new Centre for Defence Medicine. [80568]

Mr. Doug Henderson: A project team comprising Service and civilian staff from my Department is responsible for drawing up a Statement of Requirement (SOR) for the Centre for Defence Medicine (CDM). An outline concept for the CDM has been completed and is being used as the basis for obtaining expressions of interest from NHS Hospital Trusts.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what attitude surveys have been undertaken amongst

medical staff in the Defence Medical Services concerning the retention of a tri-service core hospital; and what were the results. [80574]

Mr. Doug Henderson: A survey of the options for future secondary care provision was carried out in July 1998 among Defence Medical Services (DMS) personnel serving at Defence Secondary Care Agency units in the UK and the DMS Training Centre. The survey was conducted by BMRB International and their findings were published in a report entitled "Views of Military Secondary Care. Report on a survey conducted for the Surgeon General" dated September 1998, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what initiatives he has taken to recruit and retain staff in the Defence Medical Services; and what have been the results. [80570]

Mr. Doug Henderson: A tri-Service recruitment campaign for regular nurses, General Medical Practitioners and consultants has been conducted over the last two months. In response, we have received inquiries from nearly 400 people, although it is too early to say how many will ultimately join the Defence Medical Services (DMS). Work is continuing on a range of other measures to improve recruitment and retention, as indicated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in his announcement on 14 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns *328–29*, about the new strategy for the DMS. These measures include identifying the causes of overstretch and more effective ways of reducing it, harmonising different terms of service within the DMS and addressing concerns about the need to maintain military standards and ethos among DMS personnel working in MOD Hospital Units in NHS Hospitals.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the proportion of the arms and military equipment held by Yugoslavia which was acquired from *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other NATO member states. [80241]

Mr. George Robertson: The Government are committed to both the EU arms embargo on Croatia and Bosnia and the UN embargo on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. We interpret these embargoes to include any items included on the Military List.

The Government's Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls, which was published on 25 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *343–50*, lists by country of destination the numbers of export licences issued in each equipment category and gives details of the military equipment for which licences were granted between 2 May and 31 December 1997. It also sets out the value of defence exports to each country between 1 January and 31 December 1997.

My Department does not routinely record details of arms transfers by other NATO members.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the origin of the hits received by the Government website section devoted to Yugoslavia *(a)* before and *(b)* since it was translated into Serbo-Croat; and what plans he has to translate it into Albanian. [80239]

Mr. George Robertson: We are not able to determine the precise level of usage of specific parts of the Ministry of Defence website, and cannot therefore give access figures for the joint MOD/FCO section on Kosovo. We can, however, identify the origin of accesses to the MOD website as a whole. Information in Serbian was first added to the section on Kosovo on 29 March. The daily figures for accesses, for the days immediately before and after that date, are as follows:

Date	*Daily accesses*
28 March 1999	86,523
30 March 1999	149,503

Accesses from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are currently running at about 1,000 per day, with a total of 17,129 having been recorded between 20 March and 8 April. About 400 accesses per day were recorded prior to the inclusion of Serbian-language information on 29 March, with about 50 per day recorded in the period 1–20 March.

A total of 1,820,204 accesses were recorded in March 1999, of which the most frequently accessing countries (both before and after the inclusion of Serbian-language information) were: the UK (approx. 24 per cent.); the US (approx. 22 per cent.); Canada (2.5 per cent.); Switzerland (1.8 per cent.); Germany (1.7 per cent.); Australia (1.3 per cent.); France (1 per cent.). These proportions are fairly consistent from month to month, although the exact number of accesses can vary considerably.

The translated pages are stored on an FCO web server and are measured using a different metric (page impressions rather than hits). They have received 3,300 page impressions in the last seven days. This translates, very approximately, to some 23,000 hits.

There are no plans at present to translate any pages into Albanian.

Military District Hospitals

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capital expenditure was *(a)* incurred by his Department and *(b)* undertaken by NHS trusts as a result of contractual arrangements with his Department, in setting up the Department's hospital units. [80619]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *204*.

Hunt Class Sonar Upgrade

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the expected in-service date for the Hunt Class sonar upgrade; and what changes to the in-service date have taken place since the project's inception. [80204]

Mr. Spellar: The in-service date for the Hunt Class Sonar 2193 is now 2003, with a 2 year fitting programme for the whole class. This is the first change to the ISD since the project's inception. The original in-service date was 2001.

Merlin ASW Helicopter

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many existing Type 22 and Type 23 Frigates will be equipped with the Merlin ASW helicopter. [80206]

Mr. Spellar: Type 23 Frigates are all designed to operate with Merlin helicopters. The number of ships which will be equipped with Merlin will, however, depend on the operational deployments of the individual vessels. Type 22 Frigates will not be equipped with Merlin helicopters.

Larkhill Centre

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current role and future work of the Surveillance, Target Acquisition, Night Observation and Counter-surveillance Centre at Larkhill. [80017]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The current role of the Army's Surveillance Target Acquisition, Night Observation and Counter-surveillance (STANOC) Centre at Larkhill is to provide a focus for STANOC disciplines and technology, to provide advice on equipment needs and development, on training and on doctrine. The Centre also provides operational support and advice as required, to the Field Army and Other Government Departments.

The STANOC Centre is currently the subject of a review to determine the most cost-efficient means by which STANOC needs can be delivered in the future. I will write again once the outcome of the review is known.

Royal Hospital Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the Royal Hospital Haslar was not expanded to the number of beds specified in Defence Cost Study 15. [80569]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Royal Hospital Haslar was not expanded to the number of beds specified in Defence Cost Study 15 because activity levels in the Hospital have not warranted such an expansion and additional staff have not been available to increase local capacity and therefore throughput. In addition, NHS policy since the mid 1990s has increasingly been to promote large acute hospitals which can contain a critical mass of speciality and sub-speciality activity. The Royal Hospital Haslar falls outside this recommended scale.

Weapons

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to seek international agreement to ban weapons of indiscriminate or mass destruction other than anti-personnel mines. [80210]

Mr. George Robertson: The Government have a deep commitment to arms control as a vital element in increasing Britain's security through building wider security structures. Out comprehensive approach to the aims of arms control is evident through our commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the 1980 UN Weaponry Convention. We are also encouraging universal adherence to the NPT and urging those states who have yet to do so, to ratify the CTBT, which is a prerequisite for the treaty to enter into force. The United Kingdom is playing a leading role in the negotiations to establish a verification Protocol to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) and is working for the re-establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee of the Conference on Disarmament to negotiate a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT). We stand ready to play an active role in these negotiations also.

Meteorological Office

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Meteorological Office for 1999–2000. [80383]

Mr. Spellar: The Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office is responsible for providing meteorological and related services to a wide range of customers, including the armed forces, government, civil aviation, shipping, emergency services, media, commerce, industry and the public. It also undertakes research related to meteorology and climate. During 1999–2000 the Meteorological Office will be set the following challenging targets:

Key Target 1:

To achieve a value for the Global Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) Index of at least 110.2 index points on 31 March 2000 from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 1995;

Key Target 2:

To achieve a value for the UK NWP Index of at least 104.0 index points on 31 March 2000 from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 1997;

Key Target 3:

To achieve a value for the Service Quality Index of at least 105.0 index points on 31 March 2000 from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 1997, in line with customer requirements. The index covers representative services and products for defence, civil aviation, public and business customers;

Key Target 4:

To achieve a value for the agreed Efficiency Index of at least 112.0 index points on 31 March 2000 from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 1997;

Key Target 5:

To achieve an overall return on capital employed (ROCE) of at least 2.9 per cent.;

Key Target 6:

To achieve a total contribution from commercial activities in 1999–2000 of not less than £2.2 million.

Building and Property Group

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts his Department currently has with Building and Property Group Ltd.; what services are currently provided to each defence establishment by the Company; and what is the total value of the contracts. [80045]

Mr. Spellar: The Building and Property Group Ltd. consist of a number of companies: Building and Property Ltd., Building and Property Defence Ltd. and Unicorn Consultancy Services. There are at present 24 Works Services Management, WSM, contracts, varying in length from three to five years, with Building and Property Defence Ltd. within the UK and 1 WSM contract in the

Falkland Islands. The total value of each contract comprises a management fee paid to the WSM and the value of repair, maintenance and works expenditure. The total annual value of these contracts is approximately £124 million.

There are 9 Establishment Works Consultant, EWC, contracts with Unicorn Consultancy Services Ltd. These vary in length from 5 to 7 years. The EWC is responsible for auditing and monitoring works contracts on behalf of the Property Manager. The total annual value of these contracts is £2.3 million.

There are 3 Project Management, PM, contracts; one is at Winterbourne Gunner, Salisbury, with Building and Property Services Ltd., at a total value of £225k. Another is with Building and Property Group Ltd. at Westmoors, at a total value of £140k. The third PM contract is with Unicorn Consultancy Services at the Defence Test and Evaluation Organisation, Boscombe Down, at a total value of £247k.

There is one Specialist Term Commission for Electrical Engineering Advisory Services, with Building and Property Ltd., for use throughout MOD. The contract period is for three years at an estimated value of £450k.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Redundant Farm Buildings

18. **Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on the green belt of the granting of planning consents for redundant farm buildings to be used for light industrial purposes. [78833]

Mr. Caborn: My Department has undertaken two research studies which, among other matters, have looked at the re-use of redundant farm buildings in the Green Belt and which have informed the drafting of relevant planning policy guidance.

Freight Costs

19. **Mr. Rapson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on freight costs in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other EU member states. [78834]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friends the Members for Carmarthen, East and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams) and for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) today, *Official Report*, column 7.

Genetically Modified Organisms (Monmouthshire)

20. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what applications he has received to release genetically modified organisms at sites in Monmouthshire; and what objections he has received to such applications. [78835]

Mr. Meacher: We have received two applications to release genetically modified organisms at sites in Monmouthshire. Both applications were in respect of small research trials of Spring GM oilseed rape and both have been given consent. In one case 9 letters of objection were received relating to the Monmouthshire site.

Local Government Finance

21. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the level of changes in council taxes in shire areas over the next three years. [78836]

Ms Armstrong: Decisions on the level of council tax are a matter for each authority.

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what would be the average council tax for each local authority in England if each authority's net revenue expenditure in 1999–2000 was set at the provisional capping level and, excepting the receipts from each authority's share of NNDR, had to be met entirely from council tax receipts. [80277]

Ms Armstrong: We made a Manifesto commitment to abolish crude and universal capping. There were, therefore, no provisional capping levels for 1999–2000.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he proposes to use his capping powers for 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [80718]

Mr. Prescott: This year, we fulfilled our Manifesto commitment to abolish crude and universal capping. We did not announce capping limits in advance. For the first time since the introduction of the council tax, authorities were not told what to do by the Government. They were able to make up their own minds on their budgets, taking account of their local circumstances and the views of local people.

The vast majority of authorities in England have exercised this new discretion sensibly and a range of council tax increases have resulted. Indeed, some authorities have frozen or reduced their council taxes. Others have made large increases, which I trust will not be repeated. As a result, average Band D taxes rose by 6.8 per cent. this year, compared with 8.6 per cent. rises last year. I have therefore decided not to cap any authorities this year.

Although the general response has been sensible, there are some exceptions. Despite the most generous Local Government Settlement for years, some authorities have made large increases both in their budgets and in council taxes. I have looked particularly closely at authorities with increases in council tax over 9 per cent. I have decided to call in twelve with the largest increases in budget requirement to the Department to discuss why they have made such large increases and put them on warning for next year. I will be telling these authorities that, when I use the new reserve powers to decide if their budgets for 2000–01 are excessive, I will look back at their increases over two years. This is a new power.

The authorities are Ashfield, Herefordshire, Huntingdonshire, Kingston upon Thames, Milton Keynes, Norfolk, Shropshire, South Cambridgeshire, Tewkesbury, Torbay, Tyne and Wear Fire and Civil Defence Authority and Woking.

Other authorities have also made large increases in council tax. I will not be calling these authorities in, but any authority which has increased its council tax by more than the average this year will need to be particularly careful when deciding next year's budget. All authorities, including police authorities, should remember that I will be looking at every local authority budget when I decide whether and how to use my new reserve powers next year. As well as looking at the latest increases, I will be able to look back at increases over two years. I will also be able to designate authorities both in year and for the following years. Authorities should be in no doubt that we will act if council taxes rise unacceptably.

Overall, however, I am pleased that most authorities have behaved responsibly as expected, justifying the trust we placed in them when we did not announce capping limits in advance. As a result of the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, local authorities will have two more years of good increases in grant. I am looking to them to continue to play their part in delivering better services with reasonable council tax increases.

Buses

22. **Jacqui Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for increasing public use of buses. [78837]

Dr. Reid: In addition to increasing financial support for buses, we have put forward a package of policy measures aimed at improving bus travel and increasing bus use. They are set out in our policy document published on 23 March, "From Workhorse to Thoroughbred—A Better Role for Bus Travel".

Road Haulage Industry

23. **Mr. Plaskitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met representatives of the road haulage industry to discuss prospects for the industry; and if he will make a statement. [78838]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler). We had a very constructive first meeting of the Road Haulage Forum on Thursday 8 March.

Mrs. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met representatives of the road haulage industry; and if he will make a statement. [78921]

Dr. Reid: I chaired a very constructive, long and in-depth first meeting of the Road Haulage Forum on Thursday 8 April. Together with my noble Friend the Under-Secretary and my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, I met representatives of the Freight Transport association, the Road Haulage Association and the Transport and General Workers Union.

We are going to jointly examine, in the shortest period of time, the state of the competitiveness of the haulage industry and take external independent views where necessary to inform our discussions. We will take into account the influencing factors, with a view to looking at potential solutions.

In addition, we will look at a range of other issues, for example, offering special assistance to small haulage businesses.

I hope that all hauliers will now agree that dialogue, not disruption, is the way forward.

Public Transport (Access)

24. **Ms Kingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement concerning access for disabled people to public transport. [78839]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government are committed to comprehensive civil rights for disabled people. Accessible public transport, within the framework of our integrated transport policy, is fundamentally important to delivering that commitment.

We are using powers in Part V of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to make "accessibility regulations" to require new trains, trams, buses, coaches and taxis to be accessible to disabled people, including those who travel in a wheelchair.

Freight

25. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to encourage the transfer of freight from road to rail. [78840]

Mr. Prescott: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) today, *Official Report*, column 4.

A47

26. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the further studies on improving the A47 east of Norwich will be completed. [78841]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State announced on 23 March 1999, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns *150–52*, that a study of the A47 between Norwich and Great Yarmouth was programmed to begin in 2000–01. The duration of the study will depend on the complexity of the issues identified, but it is anticipated it will take at least a year to complete.

The Highways Agency is taking forward a separate, smaller-scale study for a safety scheme on the Blofield to Acle section of the A47. That study is due for completion this year. The Agency plans to implement other minor safety improvements on this section during Autumn 1999.

Freight Vehicles (Excise Duty)

27. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect of recent changes to excise duty on freight vehicles on pollution emission targets. [78842]

Dr. Reid: Vehicle excise duty (VED) for heavy goods vehicles was frozen for all but the new classes of vehicles with 11.5 tonne axle weights. Rates for these classes were set in the Budget with the aim of discouraging their use,

in view of the significant additional road damage they cause. In the 1998 Budget, the Chancellor announced a general review of VED for goods vehicles, with the intention of ensuring that VED rates more accurately reflect these vehicles' environmental impact; this work is proceeding.

The 1999 Budget also doubled the maximum VED concession for reduced pollution lorries and buses to £1,000. We expect this to act as a further incentive to operators to adapt their vehicles to meet stringent particulate emission standards.

Local Government (Ethics)

28. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures the Government are taking to raise ethical standards in local government; and if he will make a statement. [78843]

Ms Armstrong: On 24 March my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister published a consultation paper, "Local Leadership Local Choice", copies of which were placed in the Vote Office and the House Library. The paper sets out the Government's proposals and draft legislation for new forms of local governance and a new ethical framework for local government.

Natural Habitats

29. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure the protection of natural habitats in the implementation of his policy on access to the countryside. [78844]

Mr. Meacher: In implementing its plans for a statutory right of access to open countryside, the Government will provide for the countryside agencies and national park authorities to be able to close land or otherwise restrict access to protect the interests of conservation of wildlife.

North-west Regional Chamber

30. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the regional Chamber in the north-west will be officially established. [78845]

Mr. Caborn: We are currently considering proposals from the North West Regional Assembly for designation as the regional chamber for the North West under the RDA Act 1998, and I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Road and Rail Network

31. **Dr. George Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with European Commissioners on the future development of the United Kingdom road and rail network within the trans-European network. [78846]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Neither my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport nor I have had any recent discussions with European Commissioners on the future development of the United Kingdom road and rail network within the Trans-European Network (TEN). But our officials have had discussions with officials of the Commission in the context of the 1999 TEN funding round.

Home Shopping

32. **Dr. Whitehead:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what appraisal he has made of the environmental consequences of the development of home delivery and home ordering of retail household goods. [78847]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In our document "Sustainable Distribution: A Strategy", published on 2 March 1999, we stated that we would commission research into the long term implications of home shopping and its variants on our integrated transport policy in general and for planning and transport services in particular. This would cover environmental impacts.

Assembly (East Midlands)

33. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received requesting a directly elected assembly for the east midlands. [78848]

Mr. Caborn: We have not received any representations for a directly elected assembly for the East Midlands.

Train Journeys

34. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many train journeys were *(a)* cancelled and *(b)* seriously delayed in 1998. [78849]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1998 it is estimated that 70,000 train journeys were cancelled and 580,000 were delayed beyond the Charter targets.

Road Maintenance

35. **Mr. White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress is being made on improving road maintenance; and if he will make a statement. [78850]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government have made road maintenance a top priority and we are committed to restore the cuts in local road maintenance funding. New techniques are being introduced to minimise the need for maintenance and reduce the impact of maintenance works on the motorist.

Lead Products

36. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has made to the European Commission regarding the ban imposed by the Danish Government on the importation, sale and production of lead products. [78851]

Mr. Meale: Representations have been made by the Department of Trade and Industry to the European Commission on this issue via the normal procedures. The UK supports reducing exposure to lead. However, we believe that the proposed restriction by Denmark does not meet the requirements of European Union legislation.

Rural Public Transport

37. **Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of his measures to improve rural public transport. [78852]

Dr. Reid: My Department has been conducting an initial survey of the use of the new funding for the support of rural bus services. Replies received so far from 51 local authorities (out of a total of 73 English authorities in receipt of the funding) show there are over 550 new services, with a further 620 improved in frequency or coverage, as a result of the first year of the funding. We will be carrying out shortly a more detailed survey with local authorities to provide a fuller assessment of the impact of this new funding at the end of its first financial year.

Sustainable Distribution

38. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's document, "Sustainable Distribution: A Strategy". [78853]

Dr. Reid: Our document, published on 2 March 1999, is the first of its kind. It takes a strategic look at the entire distribution industry of the United Kingdom and considers not only the role it plays today but its potential for the future. We intend to work in partnership with industry to ensure that our entire distribution network provides an efficient and competitive world class service:

that it operates in a fair and open market, not only in the UK but abroad;

that it is fully integrated in our transport and planning policies, both at national and local government levels; with road, rail, air and shipping being used to their best advantages on a system of infrastructure which is itself integrated and;

that it operates in a manner which meets our environmental and social objectives to minimise pollution, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to manage development pressures on the landscape, to reduce noise and disturbance and to reduce the number of accidents and injuries.

Public Transport

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that good-quality public transport is available as an alternative to motoring. [78827]

Mr. Prescott: The Government's integrated transport policy sets out the framework for delivering better public transport and a greater choice in transport for all. We are helping bring this about by investing an extra £1.8 billion in integrated transport over the next three years.

Royal Society Report (GM Foods)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the report by the Royal Society in September 1998 on genetically modified foods. [73657]

Mr. Meacher: The report from the Royal Society contained some useful recommendations including the importance of research, the need to look for alternatives to antibiotic resistance markers, the need to keep consumers informed of developments in biotechnology linked with increased clarity in labelling and the need to look again at the remit of the advisory committees. The Royal Society has built upon this useful work by submitting a paper in response to the review of the framework for overseeing developments in biotechnology and genetic modification, announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 17 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns *644–45*. The Royal Society's views are now being considered as part of that review.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the dates on which each site where genetically modified trial crops are being grown was *(i)* first subject to such cultivation and *(ii)* last inspected by a Health and Safety Executive inspector. [74866]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Since 1993 there have been approximately 620 sites where genetically modified crops have been grown for research purposes. In 1999 the figure is expected to be about 95. The locations and further details of these sites are available on the statutory public register. A report on the inspection activities in the past 12 months will be published shortly and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy that those responsible for the production of genetically modified crops be required to take out adequate insurance to cover the costs of any resulting damage to *(a)* the environment and *(b)* other crops. [75109]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* There is already some protection though Civil law and general product liability. The issue of environmental liability is an important one and the principle that those who damage the environment should pay for remedying the damage caused is one that I would strongly support. The European Commission is currently finalising a White paper on environmental liability and this may offer a way forward. We expect the White paper to include the question of damage by genetically modified organisms but need to study the detail of the Commission's proposals before reaching any conclusions.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the scientific journals his Department has consulted in its investigations into the safety of genetically modified crops. [79267]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* The specific information requested is not available. Through my Department's library, officials have access to all scientific journals published worldwide.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish a comprehensive list of *(a)* trial sites of genetically modified crops in the United Kingdom in the year 1999–2000 and *(b)* details of genetically modified crops intended to be grown at these trial sites. [80103]

Mr. Meacher: This information is already available on the public register held in DETR and on the DETR website.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the total number of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76830]

Mr. Prescott: There have been no occasions since 2 May 1997 when Special Advisers in this Department have travelled abroad in an official capacity unaccompanied by Ministers. Costs are accounted for within the total costs for any overseas trips by Ministers.

Inland Waterway Shipping

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy on the applicability of Council Directive 82/714/EEC in technical requirements for inland waterway vessels to controls imposed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency on inland waterway shipping in the United Kingdom. [78729]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The UK is exempt from Directive 82/714/EEC, as provided for by Article 7 (1) a of the Directive.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what additional conditions the United Kingdom has imposed on navigability licences for inland waterway vessels, in the terms permitted by Article 3(6) of Council Directive 76/135/EEC, dated 20 January 1976; and if he will make a statement. [78731]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. The conditions for operating passenger ships of whatever flag on UK waters were amended following the "Marchioness" disaster. These regulations were applied by Statutory Instrument SI 1992 No 2358 which incorporated a phasing-in period which ended on 1 April 1998.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy on the applicability of Council Directive 76/135/EEC on reciprocal recognition of navigability licences for inland waterway vessels to controls imposed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency on inland waterway shipping in the United Kingdom. [78730]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The technical requirements for the operation of passenger ships on UK waters were amended following the "Marchioness" disaster. These regulations were applied by Statutory Instrument SI 1992 No 1216 and incorporated a phasing-in period which ended on 1 April 1998 to allow for alterations to existing vessels.

It is our policy to ensure that these high standards apply to all passenger ships of whatever flag which operate in UK waters. This accords with the stated aim of Directive 76/135 which is a

"first step towards improving the safety of inland navigation in the Community".

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list all those task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 which have set up *(a)* sub-groups, *(b)* working parties and *(c)* other subsidiary committees; [79253]

(2) if he will list for all task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 *(a)* their dates of establishment, *(b)* those which have issued final reports and their dates of publication, *(c)* those which have been terminated and their dates of termination and *(d)* for those bodies still in existence, expected reporting and termination dates. [79276]

Mr. Meale: I have today placed in the Library of the House a list of the task forces and reviews with external members established by my Department since May 1997, along with the requested information for each such body.

Bus Employees

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much his Department has spent on legal fees relating to the Bus Employees Superannuation Trust *(a)* in total and *(b)* in connection with the High Court hearing, of 1 March. [79539]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The previous Government decided to fund litigation by the National Bus Company pension trustees following a decision by the Pensions Ombudsman. Expenditure to date by my Department on legal and other costs related to all aspects of the litigation concerning the two NBC pension schemes (the Bus Employees Superannuation Trust and the National Bus Pension Fund) has been £980,000. Of this, costs incurred by the trustees amount to £782,000 and the Department's own costs amount to £198,000. £67,000 of the total was incurred by the previous Administration. The total includes costs of £110,000 related to the High Court hearing of 1 March, which concerned the extent to which certain provisions of the Pension Schemes Act 1993 and the Pensions Act 1995 applied to the schemes.

Countryside Access

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what environmental assessment has been carried out by his Department on the Government's Access to the Countryside proposals. [79597]

Mr. Meacher: Independent consultants undertook an assessment of the economic, environmental and social effects of different approaches to achieving greater access to open countryside. Their report has been published by my Department and copies have already been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Water Regulator

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the environmental responsibilities of the water regulator. [79600]

Mr. Meale: The Director General has a general duty, under section 3 of the Water Industry Act 1991, to further conservation and enhancement of the natural environment.

In September 1998, Ministers published "Raising the Quality", giving guidance to the Director General of Water Services on the environmental and water quality objectives to be achieved by the water industry in England and Wales in 2000 to 2005. On 1 March 1999 Ministers announced the detailed programmes of improvements to deliver the objectives.

Car Parking

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review car parking provision in planning policy guidance; and if he will make a statement. [79595]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning Policy Guidance note 3: *Housing*, a consultation draft of which was published on 23 March, proposes maximum parking standards for housing development averaging 1.5 to 2 car spaces per dwelling. Planning Policy Guidance note 13: *Transport* is in the process of being updated.

Water Customer Councils

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the role of water customer councils and their relationship with Ofwat. [79601]

Mr. Meale: Section 29 of the Water Industry Act 1991 places a duty on each customer service committee (CSC) to keep under review, to consult and to make representations to water and sewerage companies allocated to the committee about all matters appearing to the committee to affect the interests of customers or potential customers of those companies; and to investigate any complaint made by a customer or potential customer relating to the carrying out of any of the functions of a water or sewerage undertaker.

The CSCs are established by, and report to, the Director General of Water Services and advise him on issues which affect customers, to inform his decision making.

Resulting from our review of utility regulation, the Government propose to establish a new, independent consumer council for the water sector. We propose to give the new council broad functions within the regulatory system. It will act as a public advocate for consumers, and will be expected to provide information and advice on consumer issues to regulators, Government, Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the media and others. It will have the specific task of handling consumer complaints about water companies where these have not been resolved by the company concerned. The council and regulator will need to collaborate, and will be placed under a duty to agree and publish a memorandum of understanding governing such matters as the practical arrangements for consultation between them. Similar arrangements will govern the council's relationship with the Drinking Water Inspectorate. We fully recognise the importance of the regional dimension in the provision of water and sewerage services and the structure of the water consumer council will reflect this.

Bus and Cycle Lanes

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to produce regulations or guidelines relating to coloured markings on bus lanes and cycle lanes. [79634]

Ms Glenda Jackson: White markings indicating bus and cycle lanes, and yellow markings indicating bus stops and bus stop clearways, are prescribed in the Traffic Signs Regulations 1994. Guidance on their use is given in Chapter 5 of the Traffic Signs Manual and Local Transport Note 1/97 (Keeping Buses Moving). Coloured road surfaces have no meaning in law but may be used to increase the conspicuity of markings and give prominence to a section of the carriageway set aside for a particular purpose. The Highways Agency has included advice on the use of coloured surfaces for cycle lanes in their recently published guidance on Coloured Surfacing in Road Layouts.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the use of bus lanes by community transport vehicles. [79602]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The allocation of road space is a matter for highway authorities. Guidance on bus lanes and on the classes of other vehicles which authorities might wish to permit to use them was published in *Keeping Buses Moving*, Local Transport Note 1/97.

Project Prestige

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Project Prestige and on its applicability to rail services. [79599]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the Prestige contract, the Transys consortium will update and renew ticket issuing and revenue collection systems throughout the London Transport network, leading to the introduction of contactless smartcards from 2002. Preliminary work to install ticket gates throughout the Underground network, new electronic ticket machines on services procured by LT Buses, and electronic point of sale (EpoS) machines in Pass Agents Sales Service (PASS) outlets is underway.

Since the conception of the Prestige project in 1996, LT has planned for the 12 Train Operating Companies (TOCs) in the former Network SouthEast area to participate in the scheme. Discussions have taken place with the aim of developing technical solutions that would give the TOCs the full benefits of Prestige. At present, LT is committed to the installation of ticket gates at joint London Underground/TOC stations managed by the TOCs and to upgrade these later to accept smartcards, in line with plans for other London Underground stations.

At present there is no general commitment from the TOCs to adopt Prestige ticket technology, although certain operators have expressed an interest in joint smartcard and equipment trials. In the meantime, LT will continue to ensure that the technology employed under Prestige will allow the future extension of smartcard technology to TOC stations.

Water Planning Policy

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans his Department has to introduce a planning policy guidance note on water. [79596]

Mr. Raynsford: None.

New Building

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will amend the building regulations to reduce the environmental impact of new developments; and if he will make a statement. [79594]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government are considering such amendments. Last year a comprehensive review was launched to see what contribution the building regulations could make towards achieving our targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions. The review is progressing well with consultation on some proposed amendments expected later this year.

Wildlife Bill

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's policy plans for a Wildlife Bill and the timetable for its implementation. [79598]

Mr. Meacher: We have consulted on the better protection and management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and considered the proposals of the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime to strengthen the enforcement of wildlife law. We are seeking an opportunity to legislate, where necessary, as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

Smoke Alarms

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will estimate the cost of installing battery-powered smoke alarms in all local authority dwellings in England; [79605]

(2) if he will estimate the proportion by region of local authority-owned dwellings fitted with smoke alarms; [79607]

(3) if he will estimate the cost of installing mains-powered smoke alarms in all local authority dwellings in England. [79583]

Mr. Raynsford: The proportion of local authority owned dwellings fitted with smoke alarms is as follows. Estimates are taken from the 1996 English House Condition Survey. They relate to occupied local authority dwellings only and are as follows:

Percentage

Government Office Region	*Proportion of occupied local authority owned dwellings with a smoke alarm*
North East	55
Yorkshire and the Humber	55
North West	65
East Midlands	65
West Midlands	65
South West	70
Eastern	55
South East	80
London	40
England	60

In 1996, 40 per cent. of occupied local authority dwellings had no smoke alarm fitted. The estimated cost of installing battery-operated smoke alarms in these dwellings is £40 million. This is based on flats requiring one smoke alarm and houses requiring two.

In 1996, 60 per cent. of occupied local authority dwellings had a smoke alarm fitted but only 16 per cent. of these were mains powered detectors. The estimated overall cost of installing mains-operated smoke alarms in the 90 per cent. of occupied local authority owned dwellings in which no mains powered smoke alarm is currently present, is £260 million.

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of lives that would be saved each year if every local authority dwelling in England was fitted with a smoke alarm. [79606]

Mr. George Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

Although no current estimate along those lines is available, fire statistics show that there were 465 fire deaths in dwellings in England in 1997 and these can be categorised by the presence or otherwise of a smoke alarm.

Presence and operation of smoke detector

	Fatal casualties	
Present, operated and raised the alarm	36	(8%)
Present, operated but did not raise the alarm	18	(4%)
Present, but did not operate	57	(11%)
Absent	354	(77%)
Total	465	

Research shows that around 82 per cent. of households in England and Wales now own a smoke alarm. However, the levels of ownership among those households in the United Kingdom having fires is much lower, at only 30 per cent.

The 1997 fire fatality statistics show the very clear benefits of increasing smoke alarm ownership further as well as the need to make sure that alarms are properly maintained and sited. Such messages are an important part of the Government's new Community Fire Safety strategy which is designed to reduce fire deaths in the home.

East of England Regional Chamber

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the regional chamber in the Eastern Region will be officially established. [79610]

Mr. Meale: There is no formal date set for the official establishment of the East of England Regional Chamber. According to the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, before a body can become the Regional Chamber for a Regional Development Agency, it needs to be designated as such by the Secretary of State. This designation has not yet occurred in this case.

However, a draft application and supporting papers were sent to DETR's Regional Policy Unit on 8 March. These papers are currently under consideration within the Department. A formal request for designation will be made by the Chamber in the next couple of weeks, once the minutes from the Chamber's inaugural meeting have been agreed.

The process of designation is a lengthy one. After an application is received, consultations need to be made within the Department. A submission must then be put before Ministers and a further consultation will follow. The Regional Development Agency must then be consulted before a final decision is made. Therefore it is not possible to state when the East of England Regional Chamber will be officially established.

Red Routes (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what red route schemes are currently planned by his Department concerning the London Borough of Wandsworth. [79700]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The roads in Wandsworth designated as red routes are the A3, A24, A205, A214, A217, A306, A3205 and A3220. The current implementation timetable in Wandsworth is given in the table. The aim is to have the whole of the network operational in 2000.

Red route	*Implementation*
A3	Most fully operational. Remainder to have red line controls before the end of 1999.
A24	All red line controls fully operational. Implementation of remaining measures to be complete by the end of 1999.
A205	All red line controls fully operational. Implementation of remaining measures to be complete by the end of June 1999.
A214	Detailed design to begin shortly.
A217	Detailed design underway. Red line controls to be operational by end 1999.
A306	Fully operational.
A3205	All red line controls fully operational. Implementation of remaining measures to be complete by the end of 1999.
A3220	Detailed design to begin shortly.

As well as red line controls, red routes consist of a package of measures, such as bus and cycle lanes, facilities for pedestrians and traffic calming, which will vary depending on local needs. These are aimed at improving the movement of people and goods and providing particular help for buses, cyclists pedestrians and people with disabilities.

Hedgerows

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to protect hedgerows in the Green Belt; and if he will make a statement. [79773]

Mr. Meale: The regime to protect important hedgerows, under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997, is not applied differentially to hedgerows in the green belt. Its requirements apply to all hedgerows which are of 20 metres or more in length or which meet another hedgerow at each end, if they are on, or adjoining, land used for agriculture or forestry, the breeding or keeping of horses, ponies or donkeys, common land, village greens, Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Local Nature Reserves. Garden hedges are excluded.

Alcohol Consumption (Thames)

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what penalties and restrictions apply to the use of alcohol by river users on the Thames; and what plans he has to review these arrangements. [79703]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under existing Port of London Authority byelaws, which regulate operational matters on the River Thames, it is an offence for the master of a vessel to navigate, or be in charge of a vessel when unfit by reason of drink. If a harbourmaster has reasonable cause to suspect that a master's fitness to navigate the vessel is impaired through alcohol, he may direct the vessel to stop or to a designated berth in order to carry out a breath test. The limit is 35 microgrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath. A person in breach of these byelaws will be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding £1,000 and a daily fine of £100.

The Government are aware of public concern about the need to regulate alcohol abuse in the maritime industry. We intend to issue a consultation paper in the near future seeking views on whether there should be national legislation to combat alcohol abuse on board ship, and, if so, what form such legislation might take. We intend our proposals to apply to all seafarers, including those who operate leisure craft.

Rents

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is on the relationship of council rents to market rents; and if he will make a statement. [79603]

Mr. Raynsford: Councils and Registered Social Landlords have provided housing for several decades at below market levels to meet the needs of households who cannot afford the costs of owner occupation or market renting.

The levels of rent charged by councils have evolved incrementally over many years without any necessary correlation with market levels or with the perceived value of the property.

The Housing Green Paper to be published later in the year will look at options for strengthening the link between social rents and the size, location and condition of properties.

The Government will consult extensively on any proposals in the Green Paper. It is important that any reforms help make the housing market and labour market fairer for all concerned.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about rent levels in (i) the private sector, (ii) housing associations and (iii) local councils. [79604]

Mr. Raynsford: The mean rent for all types of private sector letting in England in 1997–98, as estimated from the Survey of English Housing, was £79 per week. This excludes water and other charges.

The mean housing association rent in England at 31 March 1998 is estimated as £49.71. This excludes service charges. Housing associations will be expected to limit annual increases in their overall rent and service charges for their stock to no more than RPI + 1%.

The mean local authority rent in England at April 1998 is estimated as £42.24. The Government's policy is that the average local authority Guideline Rent in England will increase by RPI + 1% in 1999–2000, by RPI + 2% in 2000–01 and by RPI + 2% in 2001–02.

Local Authority Estate Disposal

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he plans to prevent financial rules on the disposal of land and buildings by local authorities resulting in gazumping. [79699]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government published for consultation on 7 December 1998 a package of proposals aimed at making the home buying and selling process easier and avoiding problems such as gazumping. We will consider carefully responses to the consultation in reaching conclusions on action required to improve the process in the interests of all responsible sellers and buyers.

Right to Roam

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to extend the proposed right to roam legislation to cover access to rivers by canoeists. [79693]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's plans to introduce a statutory right of access to open countryside will extend only to those on foot for the purposes of quiet open-air recreation. Statutory duties of the Environment Agency with respect to water include a duty to promote the use of waters and associated land for recreational purposes. The Agency and the water and sewerage undertakers also have environmental and recreational duties which include a requirement, so far as is reasonably practicable and consistent with other enactments relating to their functions, to ensure that water and associated land to which they have rights is made available for recreational purposes. They must also have regard to the desirability of preserving freedom of access to places of natural beauty. A revised Code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation, which gives guidance on the exercise of these duties, will shortly be issued for consultation.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79615]

Mr. Meale: The available information is currently being collected by each Department to meet the Environmental Audit Committee's request for information on environmental appraisals as part of its second inquiry into the Greening Government Initiative.

Green Belt

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the green belt land in each local authority area. [79841]

Mr. Raynsford: Information on the area of green belt land in each local authority is not currently available. Estimates under preparation, based on designated green belt areas shown in adopted and deposited local plans, should be finalised later in the year.

Ports Policy

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 16 February 1999 to the hon. Member for Hull West and Hessle (Mr. Johnson), *Official Report*, columns *606–07*, how he intends to secure public accountability in respect of the statutory powers and duties of Newhaven Port. [80111]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Answer to which reference is made announced preparation by the Government of a comprehensive ports policy paper, and a consultation paper including an invitation to comment. Details of the measures the Government will take on accountability and other key issues will be in that policy paper which will be issued later this year. These will not be limited to trust ports, although they have special obligations, but will cover company-owned ports such as Newhaven.

Section 56 Grants

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the applications submitted for section 56 grants since 1 January 1990, indicating in each case which were successful and how much was awarded. [80096]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Schemes accepted for section 56 grants after 1 January 1990 and the grant allocated or paid are as follows:

	£ million
Ivanhoe Line	1.4
Midland Metro	40.0
Robin Hood Line	4.4

Grant payments for a number of other schemes started before 1 January 1990 and continued after that date.

During this period, a number of authorities have developed potential section 56 schemes and have discussed these with officials in my Department. We do not keep a centralised record of all such discussions.

Metropolitan Railway Passenger Services Grant

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason the Special Grant report (No. 45) (Metropolitan Railway Passenger Services Grant 1999/2000) does not cover a period of three years. [79721]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Special Grant Report (No. 45) was made under section 88B of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, as substituted by paragraph 18 of Schedule 10 to the Local Government Finance Act 1992. The use of that power is an interim measure pending establishment of a permanent power to pay the grant. Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation, the Strategic Rail Authority will have a broad power to make payments, including grants to passenger transport authorities (PTAs).

British Rail

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what factors underlie the scale of increase in the budget of British Rail in 1999–2000. [79722]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are several factors underlying the increase between the estimated outturn of £58 million for British Rail in 1998–99 and the planned expenditure of £93 million for British Rail in 1999–2000. The main factor is an increase in net interest charges. The long-term interest rate which British Rail pays on its debt will remain unchanged, whilst the short-term interest rate which it receives on its cash reserves is expected to fall. The differential between the two rates is therefore expected to widen, increasing net interest charges.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what (i) guidance and (ii) instruction has been given to Sir Alastair Morton in respect of his role in connection with PTEs in the period prior to the creation of a Strategic Rail Authority. [79723]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the role the Strategic Rail Authority will have in respect of passenger transport authorities. [79724]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) will work closely with other key organisations, including Passenger Transport Authorities, to promote rail within our integrated transport policy. Passenger Transport Executives are co-signatories to a number of franchise agreements, which the SRA will inherit.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy towards working time in the road transport sector, with particular reference to the current Commission proposals. [80157]

Dr. Reid: The Government have implemented the extant Working Time Directive in the UK and accepts the principle of extending working time legislation to transport generally. However, we believe that any controls should reflect the needs of business and employees and the public and should include sufficient flexibility to take account of their particular operational needs. We have particular concerns about the scope, derogations and night work provisions. We are addressing these issues in the European Union with a view to securing a Directive in the currently excluded sectors which is balanced and sensible.

Orange Badges

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the estimated total number of disabled orange badges in circulation in each of the last 10 years. [80200]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Details of the estimated total number of Orange Badges on issue in England over the last 10 years are:

Thousand

Year	*Total number of Orange Badges on issue in England*
1989	929
1990	979
1991	1,102
1992	1,187
1993	1,275
1994	1,336
1995	1,463
1996	1,517
1997	1,636
1998	1,717

The figures for Scotland and Wales are compiled, and held separately, by my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales respectively.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to review eligibility criteria for disabled orange badges; [80199]

(2) what plans the Government have to review eligibility for disabled orange badges in respect of people who are severely but temporarily disabled through *(a)* waiting for treatments and *(b)* prolonged treatment and recovery. [80198]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are no plans to change the eligibility criteria for an Orange Badge at this time.

However, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), who are our statutory advisers on the transport needs of disabled people, have submitted a paper to us about the Scheme, which includes such matters as the eligibility criteria and abuse.

To inform us in our consideration of DPTAC's paper, my officials are exploring with all local authorities in England their procedures for issuing Orange Badges. In the light of information received from local authorities we will want to consider DPTAC's paper very carefully before deciding what, if any, changes to the Scheme might be appropriate.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which psychiatric disorders have been accepted as valid criteria for the award of disabled orange badges. [80201]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. Apart from blind people and people with very severe upper limb disabilities, the key eligibility criterion to qualify for a badge is a permanent and substantial disability which causes either inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking. People with "psychiatric disorders" may be eligible for a badge but only if their walking ability is also very seriously affected.

Terminal 5 Inquiry

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the public sector costs incurred on the Terminal 5 inquiry in respect of *(a)* attendance by civil servants, *(b)* the Government's legal costs and *(c)* tax relief accorded to BAA. [80152]

Mr. Caborn: The answers are as follows:

(a) No estimate of costs has been made;

(b) Approximately £961,000 excluding agencies;

(c) Not possible to estimate any effect on taxation of BAA.

Drivers (Database)

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made towards the operation of a computerised database to hold details of all insured drivers and their vehicles. [80473]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Plans for a motor insurance database have been prepared by the insurance industry with the support of my Department. Work is going ahead to set up the database as soon as possible.

European Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Presidency draft of a council directive on the minimum health and safety requirements regarding the response of workers to risks arising from physical agents connected to the Explanatory Memorandum submitted by his Department to the European Scrutiny Committee is subject to the confidentiality of Council proceedings. [80588]

Mr. Meale: The Presidency draft text appears to be subject to the confidentiality requirements of the Council Rules of Procedure.

Since the text is substantially different from that published by the European Commission in 1994, my Department, in line with Cabinet Office guidance, submitted an Explanatory Memorandum on this proposal in order to keep the European Scrutiny Committees informed about progress. The German Presidency has indicated that it wishes to reach common position on a compromise text during its term.

Concessionary Travel

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for the introduction of a national concessionary travel scheme for retired and disabled people. [80226]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have announced our intention to introduce a national standard minimum for concessionary fare schemes for pensioners. It will require each local authority to provide a scheme in their area under which pensioners would be entitled at least to half fares on buses on purchase of a £5 annual bus pass. However, local authorities will remain free to offer more generous schemes if they see fit. Primary legislation will be required for this minimum scheme; it will be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

Water Resources

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what policy conclusions he has drawn from his discussions during his recent visit to the Indian Sub-Continent on policies relating to dams on rivers and the allocation of water between countries. [79036]

Mr. Meale: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister did not have discussions on these specific subjects. The United Kingdom supports the policies in the 1998 decision of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development on the sustainable management of freshwater. The United Kingdom also supports the 1997 UN Convention on the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses. We also await with interest the report of the international commission under Dr. Kader Asmal, Minister of Water Resources of the Republic of South Africa, on large dams.

Regional Study

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the terms of reference and areas of study are for the London to South West and South Wales study. [80021]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The London to South West and South Wales study is included in the first tranche of the multi-modal studies programme announced last month. Work on the study will start before the autumn. The Government Office for the South West will set up a steering group to include representatives from the South West Regional Planning Conference and other regional and transport interests, to determine the terms of reference and areas of study.

Council Tax

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the *(a)* highest and *(b)* lowest council tax at Band D for a council billing area, after transitional relief grant and council tax benefits in (i) Derbyshire, (ii) Lincolnshire (iii) Leicestershire, (iv) South Yorkshire and (v) Norfolk. [80621]

Ms Armstrong: The highest and lowest Band D council tax for the shire and metropolitan districts within each of the requested areas in 1999–2000 are shown in the table. No district in these areas is eligible for Reorganisation Transitional Relief Grant in 1999–2000 and figures for the amount of Council Tax Benefit that the authorities expect to provide during the year are not yet available.

County	*Highest*	£	*Lowest*	£
Derbyshire	Bolsover	905	Chesterfield	855
	North East Derbyshire	905	South Derbyshire	855
Leicestershire	North West Leicestershire	828	Hinckley and Bosworth	770
Lincolnshire	West Lindsey	806	South Kesteven	769
Norfolk	Norwich	818	Breckland	750
South Yorkshire	Sheffield	886	Doncaster	761

A505

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will visit Baldock to inspect traffic congestion on the A505 road. [79789]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend is aware of the position of the proposed A505 Baldock Bypass. He has no plans at present to visit Baldock, but will bear this invitation in mind if a suitable opportunity arises.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he has travelled on the A505 road between Royston, Baldock and Letchworth in the past 12 months in his official capacity. [79790]

Mr. Prescott: I undertake visits to all parts of the country and records of the routes that I take are not retained.

British Standards

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list *(a)* the organisations and people who form the British Standards Technical Sub Committee PTI/2/1, *(b)* the dates on which the Committee has met to date in 1999 and *(c)* the planned meeting dates for the remainder of 1999; [80466]

(2) what active chemical elements are being considered for use with a British Standard for lead replacement; what concentration of these chemical elements were recommended by the British Standards Technical Sub Committee; and what is the ranking of the performance of these elements relative to lead; [80468]

(3) what analysis has been made of motor vehicle engine wear and tear identified in Sweden since the introduction and use of lead replacement petrol; [80469]

(4) what has prevented the agreement of a British Standard for lead replacement petrol to date; [80467]

(5) what progress is being made to agree a British Standard for lead replacement petrol; and if he will make a statement. [80464]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Whilst it is not a prerequisite to the introduction of lead replacement petrol (LRP), a draft British Standard for LRP is being progressed by the British Standards Institution (BSI) Technical Sub-Committee, PTI/2/1. The BSI suspended work on the standard for approximately one year pending a legal action which was resolved towards the end of last year.

PTI/2/1 recommenced their work on 30 November 1998, and has since had three further meetings: on 18 January, 2 March and 7 April 1999. No further meetings have currently been scheduled.

BSI do not publish the names of individuals attending their committee meetings, who are present to represent the associations to which they are affiliated. On PTI/2/1 these include the Association of UK Oil Independents, Automobile Association, Chemical Industries Association, Freight Transport Association, Institute of Petroleum, Petrol Retailers Association, Royal Automobile Club, Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, UK Petroleum Industry Association, as well as officials from DETR, DTI and MOD.

In reviewing the comments received following public consultation on the preliminary draft Standard for LRP issued last year, which included consideration of the early problems in Sweden associated with LRP, it was decided that the use of sodium as one of the active chemical elements be dropped from the Standard. The Standard will now include only potassium, phosphorus and, as a result of recent technical data as to its effectiveness as a valve seat lubricant, manganese. The recommended concentrations of each additive is in the process of being finalised, but this work is well advanced and it is anticipated that the standard for LRP will be published shortly.

All of the additives currently being considered by PTI/2/1 are broadly similar in performance at similar mass concentration levels, although the maximum dosage levels and normal dosage levels will vary in order to avoid side effects on other engine components and take into account experience gained on other markets. While no additive has been shown to provide the same level of engine protection as lead under extreme engine operating conditions, in terms of the effectiveness of LRP, there is ample evidence to demonstrate that it is a satisfactory, and greener, alternative to leaded four-star petrol; and that owners of older cars will be able to switch seamlessly to this fuel for normal everyday motoring.

Motorway Noise

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 8, for what reason he has not published the new criteria on noise reduction and ring-fenced annual budget for the Highways Agency before the start of the financial year 1999–2000; and when he expects to do so. [80519]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *50–51*, in which both criteria and the budget for noise mitigation measures were announced.

Southall to Reading Main Line

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has held with Railtrack plc on extending electrification of the western main line from Southall to Reading and beyond, with particular reference to a connection for access to the Heathrow main line stations for trains originating from western England and South Wales. [80437]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. Railtrack's 1999 Network Management Statement, published on 25 March, sets out on pages 160–165 their investment plans for the Great Western Main Line. It does not contain any proposals for electrification of these stretches of line.

B5404

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the traffic problems at the Plantation Lane section of the B5404 road at Hopwas; and what traffic calming measures he plans to put in place at this section of the road. [79861]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Highway Authority for the B5404 is Staffordshire County Council and as such it would be for that authority to conduct any assessment of traffic problems or to implement traffic calming measures. The County Council carried out an improvement at the A51/B5404 junction in 1994 but has no plans for any further significant works in the foreseeable future. The County Council has no plans for any traffic calming measures on Plantation Lane.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the traffic capacity of the B5404 road from Lichfield to Tamworth; and what is the current traffic flow, including the proportion of heavy goods vehicles. [79860]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Staffordshire County Council, the Highway Authority, has indicated that the B5404 (known as Plantation Lane), as a single carriageway road with a width of just under 7.3 metres, has a capacity of a little less than 13,000 vehicles per 24 hour day.

The most recent classified count on the route took place in November 1995 and showed a flow of 5,383 vehicles per 12 hour day, equivalent to approximately 6,700 vehicles per 24 hour day. At the time the number of heavy goods vehicles was 324 per 12 hour day.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many accidents have been reported on the Plantation Lane section of the B5404 road at Hopwas in each of the last 15 years; and how many fatalities have resulted. [79862]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The following table shows the numbers of personal injury road accidents and fatalities on Plantation Lane in each of the last 15 years.

Injury road accidents and fatalities on Plantation Lane: 1983–1997

Year of Accident	*Accidents*	*Fatalities*
1983	4	0
1984	3	1
1985	2	0
1986	0	0
1987	2	0
1988	0	0
1989	1	0
1990	2	0
1991	4	1
1992	1	0
1993	5	0
1994	6	0
1995	7	1
1996	2	0
1997	3	0

Plantation Lane

Before 10/7/95, this was the B5404 between the Ordnance Survey grid references northing 30235 and 30495.

On 10/7/95, the A5 was rerouted and the B5404 was re-defined. From this date, Plantation Lane was the B5404 between the Ordnance Survey grid references northing 30285 and 30495.

Aviculture

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *436*, on aviculture, if he will list the avicultural purposes for which the licences were granted and the specific conditions attached to each. [80055]

Mr. Meale: The purpose of aviculture is defined by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as meaning the breeding and rearing of birds in captivity.

The conditions as stipulated on the licence to take redwing are as follows:

(1) that the birds are taken only from the named county or counties; (2) that the birds are taken only for the reason given i. e. for the purpose of aviculture; (3) that the birds are taken only by a person authorised in writing by the licensee; (4) that the birds are taken only by the use of the named device i. e. a "whoosh net", which must be operated only by authorised individuals who are fully trained and competent in the use of such a device; (5) that any bird caught in the "whoosh net" which is of a species other than a redwing-*Turdus illiacus* must be released immediately; (6) that the land owner's written permission is obtained before entry upon any land; (7) that a report is sent to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions 14 days after the expiry date of the licence.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many birds bred or reared in captivity following the issuing of a licence have subsequently been sold with the approval of his Department in each of the last five years for which information is available; for what use these birds were sold; and what subsequent checks were carried out in respect of their welfare. [79923]

Mr. Meale: No requests have been received within the last five years for approval for the sale of any offspring from birds taken under aviculture licences.

Packaging Waste

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Burgon) of 28 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *335*, on packaging waste, if he will provide details of the consultation process referred to in paragraph (viii); and when it will be concluded. [80384]

Mr. Meacher: The Department will shortly be issuing a consultation paper covering the Advisory Committee's proposal to change the present percentage activity obligations. We expect the consultation period to last approximately 6 weeks.

The consultation will consider the Advisory Committee's recommendation that there should be a 2 per cent. reduction in the convertor activity obligation (from 11 per cent. to 9 per cent.), a 1 per cent. increase each in the packer/filler activity obligation (from 36 per cent. to 37 per cent.) and retailer activity obligation (from 47 per cent. to 48 per cent.).

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to enforce standards of service on the West Coast Inter City main line; and if he will make a statement. [80276]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Franchise Agreement specifies performance and service quality standards which must be met. The Franchising Director monitors compliance with these standards and has powers to take enforcement action if they are not met.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80417]

Mr. Meale: The Treaty of Amsterdam will have minimal impact on the responsibilities of the Department and its staffing. As far as the EU Institutions are concerned, there will be an increased role for the European Parliament in some of the areas covered by the Department due to the extension by the Treaty of the co-decision procedure to much of the EU legislation in the transport and environmental fields.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice he has received from IATA in relation to the impact of the millennium bug on airport and airline safety. [80031]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department has received no specific advice from IATA. The Department proposes to issue guidance on the millennium compliance situation of foreign aircraft and airports by 1 October, although the timing may be subject to the availability of relevant information. The guidance will be based largely on information received from governmental sources such as the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)—the major international aviation governmental organisation—and the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC), supplemented by information from relevant sources such as IATA.

Road Accidents

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *467–68*, on road accidents, if he will break down the number of road deaths in 1997 by borough council areas. [80002]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Information for all borough council areas is not readily available. However fatalities in 1997 by county and unitary authority are shown in Table 46a of "Road Accidents Great Britain 1997: The Casualty Report". A copy of this publication may be found in the House of Commons Library.

Rail Links

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to carry out a study on the rail link between London and Cheltenham/Gloucester; what discussions he has had with *(a)* train operators and *(b)* Railtrack about this line and the services on it; what discussions he has had about providing a dual track from Swindon to Kemble; and if he will make a statement. [80106]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have no plans to carry out a study on the rail link between London and Cheltenham/Gloucester, and we have had no discussions with the train operators or Railtrack about this line or the services on it, or about providing a dual track from Swindon to Kemble.

Rural Bus Service Grant

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the level of tender prices for new and additional rural bus services in Bedfordshire funded by the rural bus service grant. [80248]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The award of contracts for subsidised bus services is a matter for the local authority concerned. However, a number of local authorities, of which I know Bedfordshire is one, have reported concerns about recent increases in tender costs. We will be considering this issue as part of our assessment with local authorities of the impact of the rural bus subsidy grant and in monitoring bus industry performance more generally.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions whom he has consulted in the course of making his decision over the application by British Nuclear Fuels plc to operate a mixed oxide plutonium fuels plant at Sellafield; what

matters are currently under consideration in respect of the application; and when he expects to make an announcement on the matter. [80402]

Mr. Meale: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) on 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *189*.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to paragraph 9.51 of his Department's Annual Report 1999, Cm 4204, what international work on the implementation of the convention on the safe management of radioactive waste and spent fuel has been supported by the United Kingdom. [80203]

Mr. Meale: The Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management has yet to enter into force. The UK signed the Convention on 29 September 1997, the day it opened for signature. Preparations for UK ratification of the Convention are under way.

Since the Convention opened for signature, the International Atomic Energy Agency has held two informal meetings to discuss preparations for implementation of the Convention's reporting and peer review requirements. UK experts have taken an active part in these meetings.

Kingshurst Parish Council

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will order an extraordinary audit of the activities of Kingshurst Parish Council in the Borough of Solihull. [80421]

Ms Armstrong: The appointment and conduct of auditors is a matter for the Audit Commission, who may order an extraordinary audit where they consider that a departure from the normal audit cycle is required. My right hon. Friend has no reason to override the role and responsibility of the Audit Commission in the case of Kingshurst Parish Council.

Rail Freight

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is introducing to promote the increased transport of freight by rail. [78818]

Mr. Prescott: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) today, *Official Report*, column 4.

Correspondence

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to reply to the letter of 20 August from the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East about a traffic reduction initiative in Essex. [79783]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department has no record of receiving a letter from the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East on this subject.

Mobile Homes

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what representations he has received concerning the commission payable by mobile home owners to site owners on completion of the sale of a home; [80099]

(2) what review he has conducted of the working of the Mobile Homes Act 1983; [80098]

(3) what steps he plans to take to ensure that mobile home owners have the right to choose the suppliers of public utilities to their homes. [80100]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department established the Park Homes Working Party last year to examine the concerns raised by national groups representing mobile home (or park home) owners and the large number of representations we have received from home owners themselves. These cover a wide range of issues including the commission payable when a home is sold on site and issues relating to the supply of utilities to individual homes.

The Working Party will be considering how to make the most effective use of the existing legislation relating to park homes (including the Mobile Homes Act 1983) and whether there is a case, in the longer term, for changing the legislation. It will make recommendations to Ministers on the way ahead later this year.

New Housing

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the implications are of his announcement of revised household projection figures on 29 March for the need for new housing developments in *(a)* Stevenage, *(b)* Devon, *(c)* West Sussex, *(d)* East Sussex, *(e)* Hertfordshire and *(f)* West Midlands. [80086]

Mr. Raynsford: As the Deputy Prime Minister said in his answer on 29 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *472*, my Department will be writing to regional planning bodies setting out further information which may be relevant in the context of preparing regional planning guidance.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the proportion of pensioners who are, on his Department's definition, living in fuel poverty; and if he will provide separate estimates for pensioners aged *(a)* 65 to 69, *(b)* 70 to 79 and *(c)* 80 years or above. [80095]

Mr. Meale: Using data from the 1991 English House Condition Survey (EHCS) we estimate that some 77 per cent. of lone pensioners were in fuel poverty and a further 43 per cent. of older couples (at least one of whom was of pensionable age) were also fuel poor. Data are not readily available on the number of pensioners in larger households in fuel poverty.

The EHCS relates to households and so detailed information on ages is readily available only for the head of each household. In 1991, of heads of household aged

(a) 65 to 69, *(b)* 70 to 79 and *(c)* 80 years or more, we estimate that some 50 per cent., 58 per cent. and 80 per cent. respectively were fuel poor.

Provisional data from the 1996 EHCS show a welcome reduction in the number of households in fuel poverty. The data are currently being analysed and will be published in the 1996 EHCS Energy Report later this year.

This information is based on the standard definition of fuel poor households being those needing to spend more than 10 per cent. of household income to achieve a satisfactory indoor heating regime.

Sewers

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what correspondence he has had with Ofwat concerning the non-publication of the condition and grade of critical sewers in *(a)* Southern Water, *(b)* North West Water, *(c)* North Surrey Water, *(d)* Thames Water, *(e)* South West Water, *(f)* South East Water and *(g)* Mid Southern Water areas following advice to Ofwat by these companies that the information is confidential. [80444]

Mr. Meale: None. I have asked the Director General of Water Services to write to my hon. Friend.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's definition of a critical sewer. [80443]

Mr. Meale: Critical sewers are those which are either costly or difficult to repair, and/or are important to the performance of the network. The definition is given in the sewerage rehabilitation manual (Water Research Council) adopted by the industry in 1983.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to give further guidance to Ofwat on developing absolute standards for the sustainability of sewerage networks; and what discussions he has had on this matter with the Director General of Ofwat. [80442]

Mr. Meale: We published "Raising the Quality" in September 1998, giving guidance to the Director General of Water Services on the environmental and quality objectives to be achieved by the water industry in England and Wales in 2000 to 2005. Paragraphs 125 to 131 of this document set out the Government's views on the maintenance of water supply and sewerage assets.

This guidance endorses the approach of the Director General, based on the serviceability of assets to customers and to the environment, as the correct framework for considering the financing of asset maintenance in the current periodic review.

The guidance also sets out the Government's view that, in the longer term, it would be appropriate for the Director General to develop absolute standards for the serviceability of water distribution and sewerage networks. We shall discuss with Ofwat, the Drinking Water Inspectorate and the Environment Agency the work needed to develop a strategic approach of this sort.

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the meeting between Water UK and the Local Government Association on tackling rat infestation of sewerage networks proposed in his Department's response to the Environment Sub-Committee's report on Sewage Treatment and Disposal has taken place; and if he will make a statement. [80445]

Mr. Meale: The first meeting was held in March. The next will be in the Summer when information currently being obtained by Water UK and the Local Government Association will be considered.

Inspection Charges

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will postpone the implementation of the proposed inspection charges under the Town and County Planning (Control of Major Accident Hazards) Regulations pending his comprehensive review of health and safety legislation. [80281]

Mr. Meacher: The Deputy Prime Minister announced on 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *586–87*, that he is to take forward a strategic appraisal of health and safety to mark the 25th anniversary of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. It is not our intention to revisit the basic structures of the Act, or to conduct a comprehensive review of health and safety legislation. The aim is to inject new impetus and relaunch the health and safety agenda. The appraisal has no bearing on the implementation from 1 April of the Control of Major Accidents Hazards Regulations 1999.

Public Bodies

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those members of advisory committees to his Department who have declared outside interests with *(a)* DiaDexus, *(b)* Cerebrus Ltd., *(c)* Cerebrus PLC, *(d)* Stanford University, *(e)* Human Genome Services Inc., *(f)* Glaxo Wellcome, *(g)* the Wellcome Institute, *(h)* Monsanto, *(i)* AgrEvo and *(j)* SmithKline Beecham. [80128]

Mr. Meale: The only member of an advisory non departmental public body sponsored by my Department who has declared an interest in one of the organisations listed in the question is:

Name	*NDPB*	*Organisation*
Sir Tom Blundell	Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution	SmithKline Beecham

Energy Conservation

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to report to Parliament on activities by energy conservation authorities under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995; and if he will make a statement. [80719]

Mr. Meacher: I have today published a report covering activity in England under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) as at the end of 1998. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House.

Local authorities were identified as crucial to the success of the Home Energy Conservation Act. Some authorities have achieved good results—but many need to do much more. Local authorities' reports point to an improvement of some 2% to 2½% in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation over the two years to the end of March 1998. This is a useful initial step, but progress is patchy, with too many areas reporting no improvement at all. Local authorities need to make faster progress towards achieving the potential they have identified.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Museums and Galleries (School Visits)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school visits from each LEA have taken place to museums and galleries sponsored by his Department in each of the last five years; [76392]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupils who have participated in school visits from each LEA to museums and galleries sponsored by his Department in each of the last five years. [76391]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The visits over the last five years by school pupils to each of the museums and galleries sponsored by my Department has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Some of the museums and galleries have supplied more detailed information on the origin of the school visitors. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly to forward this information and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Operational Licences

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list for *(a)* small and medium enterprises and *(b)* larger companies (i) all licences and permits issued by his Department and its agencies to companies permitting them to carry out their business, (ii) the cost of each such licence or permit in (A) 1997–98 and (B) 1999–2000 and (iii) the current number of companies which are in receipt of each such licence or permit. [76849]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* My Department has issued the following licences and permits:

Seventy-five permits for filming and photo shoots in Trafalgar Square were issued in 1997–98 at a total cost of £12,620. The permits are for one-off events for various organisations using Trafalgar Square for a day or part of a day for filming purposes. No permits have yet been issued for 1999–2000.

Eighty-nine media passes for news broadcasts on Trafalgar Square—these are issued free of charge.

A pigeon feed licence on Trafalgar Square in 1995 on a three year basis to BPR Investments—the value of which is commercial in confidence. This was renewed in December 1998 for a further six months.

Licences are also issued to named individuals to carry out activities on designated wreck sites. They are not issued to businesses or companies and are issued free of charge.

My Department's agency, the Royal Parks Agency, issued 362 still photography permits and 310 film licences in 1997–98 for a total of £128,000. The majority of these licences are issued to small enterprises or to individuals for such things as wedding photographs, fashion and other commercial advertisements. The majority of these licences are issued on an ad hoc basis and no figures are available centrally for 1999–2000. The licence fees are charged by the individual parks and the amount depends on the number of people and vehicles involved in the filming and the time spent in the park.

The Royal Parks Agency also currently licenses 22 businesses to operate in the Royal Parks. Fees are classified as commercial in confidence and the majority are based on a percentage of the income generated by the business. They are issued following tender auction and are issued to established business on a term basis, usually between 3 and 7 years. The majority were issued before 1997–98 and are scheduled to run beyond 1999–2000.

The details are as follows:

Name	*Nature of business*
New Shakespeare Company	Regent's Park Open Air Theatre
The Zoological Society of London	Regent's Park Zoo
Kook Fang Won Chinese Restaurant	Access to floating restaurant, Regent's Park
British Waterways Board	Access to Grand Union Canal
Serpentine Gallery	Art gallery, Kensington Gardens
Hampton Pool Ltd.	Swimming Pool, Bushy Park
Royal Collection Enterprises	Buckingham Palace Ticket Office
Mrs. A. M. Collins	Flower seller, Bushy Park
Cavan Bakery	Baker's, Bushy Park
Hearsum Family Ltd.	Catering, Penbroke Lodge Richmond Park
Golf Course Management Ltd.	Management of Richmond Park Golf Course
Original Bike Hire	Bike Hire Richmond Park
Crown Catering Group	Hyde Park Deli cafeteria
Golf Learning Centres	Regent's Park Golf and Tennis School
Said Lakhdar	Kensington Gardens kiosk catering
Park Café Ltd (formerly Kessler's Plc)	Catering in Greenwich Park, Regent's Park Rose Garden and the Lido Pavilion; managing the Greenwich Park Visitor Centre; managing the Royal Parks' deckchair concession
Sterling Food Services	Mobile catering facilities in St. James's Park, Hyde Park and Bushy Park; the sports facilities in Hyde Park

Name	Nature of business
Miss T. Rumsey	Bushy Park mobile catering
EC Soft Ice	Mobile catering Victoria Tower Gardens
Any Time Any Place Ltd.	Catering, Richmond Park
Bluebird Boats Ltd.	Boating concession in Hyde Park and Greenwich Park
Park Boats Ltd.	Boating and catering concessions in Regent's Park

Millennium National Bid Committee

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what guidelines he has issued to the Millennium National Bid Committee relating to the provision of information to applicants whose projects are not supported by the Committee. [62581]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 9 December 1998]:* The Millennium Festival is an initiative involving eleven of the National Lottery distributing bodies. Decisions on applications for grant under Round 1 (£5,000 and over) were taken individually by each of the participating distributors according to its own criteria, rules and procedures. There is no "Millennium National Bid Committee" with a decision-making function in relation to bids, although the participating distributors do co-ordinate their Festival programmes through joint meetings of a Millennium Festival Committee for each country of the United Kingdom. These committees have an advisory function only and focus on strategic issues such as co-ordination of procedures and timetables, funding priorities, geographical patterns of distribution and joint publicity and marketing. No Ministerial guidance has been issued to the Committee.

Millennium Dome (GM Foods)

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if genetically modified food will be served in the Millennium Dome; [77218]

(2) if visitors to the Millennium Experience will be informed of the presence of genetically modified food in its catering facilities. [77219]

Janet Anderson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) aims to offer an exemplary experience for the forecast 12 million visitors to the Millennium Experience at Greenwich, covering all aspects of their visit. This includes the range and quality of, and information about, the food available, including genetically modified food. All caterers who will operate in the Dome will be required to meet the relevant statutory requirements concerning food labelling. In addition, the NMEC will aim to ensure that caterers in the Dome take further steps to implement any new guidelines which might be issued to the food industry, and to meet the public's concern for comprehensive and clear identification of food ingredients.

EU Fraud

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what *(a)* discussions he has had and *(b)* proposals his Department has put forward at Council of Ministers' meetings in respect of EU fraud; and if he will make a statement. [77782]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 19 March 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary on 19 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *858–59*.

Green Transport Plan

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what involvement fleet managers have had in drawing up his Department's Green Transport Plan. [77965]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 22 March 1999]:* The Department does not employ a dedicated fleet manager. The core Department leases no vehicles itself, but contracts with the Government Car and Despatch Agency (GCDA) for cars for Ministers and senior officials. The Royal Parks Agency leases its vehicles but manages them through an overall contract manager, who is currently reviewing the contract to include further green transport requirements.

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list for all task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 *(a)* their dates of establishment, *(b)* those which have issued final reports and their dates of publication, *(c)* those which have been terminated and their dates of termination and *(d)* for those bodies still in existence, expected reporting and termination dates. [79270]

Mr. Chris Smith: The following table gives the information required.

	Date of establishment	Final reports and date of issue	Whether terminated and date of termination	Expected reporting and termination date for those still in existence
Reviews				
Review of Film Policy	May 1997	'A Bigger Picture' published March 1998	Yes, review recommendations taken forward by Film Policy Action Committee (see below)	n/a
Review of the List of Nationally Important Sporting Events which must be made available on Free-to-Air Terrestrial TV Channels	12 December 1997	Reported to Ministers on 20 March 1998 and announced 20 June 1998	Yes, 20 March 1998	n/a

	Date of establishment	*Final reports and date of issue*	*Whether terminated and date of termination*	*Expected reporting and termination date for those still in existence*
An independent review of the Future of the Royal Opera House and the English National Opera	November 1997	Report published on 30 June 1998	Yes. 30 June 1998	n/a
Review of the Future Funding of the BBC	January 1999	n/a	n/a	Report not due to be published until July 1999
Review of the efficiency and effectiveness of Government sponsored museums and galleries	February 1999	n/a	n/a	Report due to Ministers during 1999. Contract with consultants will conclude when report is produced
Working Group on Legal Deposit	January 1998	Report published 17 December 1998	Yes. July 1998	n/a
The Library and Information Commission's public library network implementation Committee	May 1998	Report 'Building the New Library Network' published October 1998	Yes. October 1998	n/a
Task Forces				
Creative Industries Task Force: to recommend steps to maximise the economic impact of the UK creative industries at home and abroad	June 1997	Mapping Document into the Creative Industries published in November 1998	n/a	Ongoing group to advise the Secretary of State
The Football Taskforce: established to investigate and recommend measures to deal with public concern on a number of issues associated with the game	30 July 1997	Eliminating Racism from Football report published 30 March 1998. Improving Facilities for Disabled Supporters report published 29 July 1998. Investing in the Community report published 11 January 1999	n/a	The Football Taskforce final report—on the commercial aspects
The Film Policy Action Committee: established to take forward the recommendations of the Film Policy Review	April 1998	n/a	n/a	Due to finish April 1999. No report. The Action Committee is overseeing the implementation of the Film Policy Review
A group of sponsorship experts will assist sports currently in receipt of tobacco sponsorship to find replacement sponsors by: assessing the needs of each sport; offering advice on best practice in establishing commercial relationships with sponsors; and assist the sports in making links with potential new sponsors	December 1998	n/a	n/a	The group provides advice direct to the sports affected

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list all those task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 which have set up *(a)* sub-groups, *(b)* working parties and *(c)* other subsidiary committees. [79262]

Mr. Chris Smith: The information required is as follows:

1. Task forces

(i) Creative Industries Taskforce

(a) Creative Industries Export Promotion Advisory Group

(b) None

(c) None

(ii) The Football Taskforce

(a) The Football Taskforce Working Group

(b) None

(c) None

(iii) The Film Policy Action Committee

(a) (i) Development

(ii) Distribution

(iii) Training

(iv) Marketing

(b) None

(c) None

2. Policy Reviews

(i) Review of Film Policy

(a) (i) Film Finance

(ii) Achieving 20 per cent. Market Share

(iii) Broadening the Audience

(iv) Inward Investment

(v) Export

(vi) Training and Education

(b) None

(c) None

(ii) Review of the future funding of the BBC

(a) (i) Future Funding Issues

(ii) BBC commercial activities and the fair trading commitment

(iii) Concessionary Licensing

(b) None

(c) None.

Disabled Athletes (Lottery Funding)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the national centres for disabled athletes which *(a)* have received Lottery funding and *(b)* are receiving grant-in-aid. [79434]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* The English Sports Council are currently considering an application for Lottery funding from the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation to support the redevelopment of facilities at Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

The five National Sports Centres operated by the English Sports Council at Bisham Abbey, Crystal Palace, Holme Pierrepont, Lilleshall and Plas Y Brenin provide services for people with disabilities, including suitable accommodation. None of the Centres receives Lottery funding at present but they are all in receipt of exchequer grant-in-aid for both revenue running costs and capital maintenance costs.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations, and from whom, he has received calling for Lottery funding for the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. [79435]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* Ministers in this Department have received no such representations. However, the English Sports Council, distributors in England of the Lottery Sports Fund, have been in discussion with the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation and agreed that an application for Lottery funding should be made.

The British Wheelchair Sports Foundation have also been invited to take the development of the Stoke Mandeville site forward as part of a Southern Consortium Network site in the English Network of the UK Sports Institute. The Lottery application and UK Sports Institute development are currently being assessed.

Listed Buildings

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will advise English Heritage that when an application is made for spot listing of a church or other place of religious worship it will suggest to the applicant that an application should first be made for a Building Preservation Notice to enable the owners of the building to enter into dialogue with English Heritage before a final decision is made. [78742]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 31 March 1999]:* Applications for listing buildings of special architectural or historic interest are made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who must consult English Heritage before he reaches a decision. A local planning authority may serve a Building Preservation Notice (BPN) where it considers that a building is of special architectural or historic interest and is under threat of demolition or alteration. When my right hon. Friend decides not to list a building which is the subject of a BPN, the local authority is liable to the payment of compensation for any loss or damage directly attributable to the effect of the notice. Local planning authorities tend therefore to serve BPNs only in exceptional circumstances and I do not believe that an extension of their use in the manner suggested would be appropriate.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list for each of the past 10 years and the current year the number of buildings listed, the spot listings and Building Preservation Notices issued by his Department for buildings for religious worship or former religious worship, indicating how many spot listings became Grade II or starred buildings. [78741]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 31 March 1999]:* The Department's records do not indicate whether buildings for religious worship which are listed are still in use. Details of listings in respect of such buildings are as follows:

Year	*Grade II*	*Grade II**	*Grade I*	*Total*
1989	172	6	3	181
1990	80	3	—	83
1991	65	3	—	68
1992	74	4	—	78
1993	127	8	1	136
1994	159	4	—	163
1995	119	3	—	122
1996	77	6	—	83
1997	59	1	—	60
1998	119	7	—	126
1999 up to 24 March 1999	22	2	—	24

Building Preservation Notices are served by local planning authorities; the Department's records do not indicate which of these received were in respect of buildings for religious worship.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79653]

Mr. Chris Smith: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contracts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies. The requirements of the Ministerial Code also apply to Parliamentary Private Secretaries when attending any meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79633]

Mr. Chris Smith: The available information is currently being collected by each Department to meet the Environmental Audit Committee's request for information on environmental appraisals as part of its second inquiry into the Greening Government Initiative.

Television Subtitling

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans his Department has to introduce an independent monitoring process for television subtitling for deaf and hard of hearing people across all forms of television broadcasting, including cable and satellite. [80081]

Janet Anderson: None at present. The Independent Television Commission requires all Channel 3 licensees, Channel 4 and Channel 5 to provide information on provision of subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing to ensure that licence requirements are being met. There is no similar licence requirement on cable and satellite broadcasters. We will be taking into account their proposals to consider further how we might encourage the cable and satellite broadcasters to improve on a voluntary basis the current provision of subtitling on their services and if they can be independently monitored.

Television Licences

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will estimate the cost of providing half-price television licences for all pensioners over the age of *(a)* 70, *(b)* 75 and *(c)* 80 years. [80269]

Janet Anderson: The estimated cost of providing half-price television licences for households where all members have reached the ages indicated would be:

(a) 70 years—£125 million

(b) 75 years—£83 million

(c) 80 years—£43 million.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the blind person's television licence discount was last uprated; and how its value in real terms has changed since that uprating. [80394]

Janet Anderson: The reduction in the television licence fee for blind people dates back to the time of radio licences, when registered blind people were entitled to a free radio licence or an equivalent reduction in the television licence fee. The reduction has remained unchanged at £1.25, the level of the radio licence on its abolition in April 1971. If the reduction had been increased in line with the All Items Retail Prices Index, it would now be £10.17.

Sports Funding

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of the money allocated by the National Lottery to Sport England is unspent. [79202]

Mr. Banks: As at 28 February 1999, Sport England had received total income from the National Lottery of £1,116 million, of which £484 million (43 per cent.) had been spent. In addition, it had outstanding contractual liabilities of £518 million (which includes £103 million paid to the English National Stadium project during March) and had made further policy commitments totalling £271 million. Its total commitments therefore exceeded its income by £157 million, but because some of these commitments will not become due for some time, it will be able to meet them all.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what amount of interest has been generated from unallocated Lottery money by English Sport. [79201]

Mr. Banks: As at 28 February 1999, Sport England's share of interest on the National Lottery Distribution Fund was a total of £106,546,142. It is not possible to identify separately how much of this is attributable to funds which were unallocated at any particular time.

Football

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress he has made with his plans to oversee the development of personal injury insurance schemes by county football associations on a corporate basis. [79909]

Mr. Banks: Further to my previous answer on this issue on 17 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *450–51*, responsibility for personal injury insurance for club members rests with the clubs themselves. The Football Association has established a Constitution Working Group which, among other things, is looking into insurance relating to football. A number of County FAs are already working closely with insurance companies to develop personal injury insurance schemes on a corporate basis for their affiliated clubs, and I understand that two County FAs have put in a statutory personal accident requirement for teams in their leagues. These are welcome developments.

Radio Licences

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment he had made of the extent of compliance with the provisions of sections *(a)* 85 and *(b)* 88 of the Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996 by the Radio Authority in its choice of successful bidders for selected area radio licences in the Solent/Mid-Hampshire area; [79814]

(2) for what reason he has not yet responded to the letter of 23 January 1999 from four representatives of companies which had competed unsuccessfully for selected area radio licences in the Solent/Mid-Hampshire area. [79815]

Janet Anderson: I received a letter dated 25 January from four representatives of companies who applied unsuccessfully for radio licences in the Solent/Mid-Hampshire area. I replied to this letter on 24 February and an additional copy of my reply was sent to each of the four parties on 30 March. My Department has no record of receiving a similar letter dated 2 January.

The Radio Authority is responsible for licensing and regulating all independent radio services under the terms of the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996 and subject to review the courts. I understand the Radio Authority is content that the licence award to Southampton City Radio meets the terms of the Broadcasting Acts.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Promotion

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to *(a)* India, *(b)* Indonesia, *(c)* Israel and *(d)* Jamaica; and what future trade delegations are planned. [76535]

Mr. Wilson: *(a)* The last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to India was 4–12 March 1999, when my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister led a senior business delegation to Delhi and Bombay.

Future trade missions planned are Energy Industries Council (19–23 April 1999), DTI Environmental Technology (4–8 October 1999), Mid-Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce (1–5 November), Machine Tool Technologies Association (November 1999), Institute of Packaging (6–9 1999), Hull and East Riding Chamber of Commerce (December 1999), Northern Development Company (7–11 February 2000), Association of British Health Care Industries (February 2000), Business Link Sussex (February 2000).

(b) The last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to Indonesia was 18–22 October 1997, for the launch of the Indonesian British Business Council.

There is one future trade mission planned by the Association of British Offshore Industries (29 November–1 December 1999).

(c) Lord Clinton-Davis, then Minister for Trade, led a delegation of 10 Export Development Counsellors to Israel During British Week in May 1998.

Future trade missions planned are Northern Development Company (26–30 April 1999), Sheffield International Trade Centre (9–12 May 1999), Dorset Business Link and South West Region (21–25 June 1999), British Link Kent (5–9 July 1999), Hull and East Riding Chamber of Commerce Industry and Shipping (30 August–3 September 1999), Southern Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise (11–15 October 1999), Business Link Herefordshire and Worcestershire (1–5 November 1999), Central and West Lancashire Chamber of Commerce (22–26 November 1999), Business Link Stockport (17–21 January 2000), The Welsh Office (31 January-4 February 2000), Lincolnshire County Council Economic Development Office (27–31 March 2000).

(d) The last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to Jamaica was in June 1995 when the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) led an unsponsored CARITAG (Caribbean Area Advisory Group) and WIC (West India Committee) mission to Jamaica, St. Lucia and Barbados.

Future trade missions planned are Hull and East Riding Chamber (Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica, May 1999), British Consultants Bureau (Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica, October 1999), Bristol Chamber of Commerce (Trinidad, Barbados and Jamaica, November 1999) and Croydon and South London Chamber (Trinidad, St. Lucia and Jamaica, February 2000).

Working Time Directive

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many civil servants in his Department have been invited to waive the Working Time Directive requirement to work less than 48 hours a week on 17 consecutive weeks; how many civil servants in his Department have refused to waive the requirement; and what is the total cost of compliance with the Directive. [76799]

Mr. Byers: Thirty five staff in the Department have signed an agreement to disapply the 48-hour limit. The standard terms and conditions of service for staff employed by the Department are well within the limits set by the working time regulations. The regulations do not require employers to keep records of the number of workers who choose not to sign an opt-out agreement and no central records are kept by this Department. Compliance costs are not kept centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. This answer covers DTI headquarters and the Insolvency Service Agency, the Radiocommunications Agency, the National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Companies House Agency, Employment Tribunal Service and ACAS.

I have asked the Chief Executive of the Patent Office to write to the hon. Member direct.

Letter from J. C. Octon to Mr. Andrew Tyrie, dated 13 April 1999:

In the absence of the Chief Executive, I am replying on behalf of the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on the Working Time Regulations. Five Patent Office staff have volunteered to waive the regulations' requirement to work no more than 48 hours a week on average over 17 consecutive weeks. No staff have refused. There would be disproportionate cost in calculating the total cost to the Office of compliance with the Working Time Regulations, but we do not believe it to be significant.

Workplace Surveillance

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received calling for guidelines on the use of surveillance cameras in the workplace; and if he will make a statement. [78492]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 25 March 1999]*: My Department has received fewer than 7 letters on this subject in the last 2 years.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what ECGD loans have been made available to British companies operating in Iraq whose investments were financed by the Banco Nationale di Lavoro of Atlanta, Georgia, USA. [78762]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 26 March 1999]:* ECGD has no record of support being given to Banco Nationale di Lavaro of Atlanta, USA in relation to the financing of British companies operating in Iraq.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Biwater plants in Iraq have been financed by the ECGD. [78761]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 26 March 1999]:* ECGD support was given to Biwater for 5 water and sewerage treatment plants in Iraq over the period 1982 to 1987 at Al Qaim, Rustumiyah and Mamoudiya.

Employment Agencies

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he intends to issue a prohibition order under section 3(a) of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 in connection with the case of baby Caroline Jongers; [79243]

(2) what steps he intends to take to ensure that parents are informed by employment agencies of the previous employment history of prospective nannies; and if he will make a statement; [79241]

(3) if he intends to exercise his powers under section 5 of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 to make regulations to secure the proper conduct of employment agencies and to protect the interests of clients of such agencies; and if he will make a statement; [79242]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate has carried out a thorough investigation into the employment agency concerned. I am satisfied that there are no grounds on which I should consider initiating action to prohibit the agency. A draft consultation document proposing measures to update the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations 1976 made under Section 5 of the 1973 Act was made available to hon. Members on 23 March, and will be formally published shortly. Included are new proposals to require details about the experience, training, ability and qualifications of those seeking to take up a position involving working with children, together with written references, where these can be obtained, to be communicated to potential employers or hirers.

US Trade Sanctions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what (i) representations he has received from and (ii) steps he is taking to support *(a)* the Scottish cashmere wool industry, *(b)* the United Kingdom pork industry and *(c)* United Kingdom candle manufacturing following the imposition of trade sanctions on such products by the Government of the United States of America. [79158]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I received a number of letters and other representations on behalf of many of the sectors on the provisional US retaliation list, including cashmere knitwear, pork products and candles. We and the European Commission urged the US not to retaliate against industries that are completely unrelated to the issue under dispute. The Government also brought forward a scheme to guarantee the bonds requested by US Customs in respect of cashmere knitwear, produced both in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK, in view of the highly seasonal nature of that industry.

These three sectors were all removed from the US retaliation list on 9 April. Whilst the removal of these and other sectors is very welcome, other industries remain targeted. The US is well aware of the harm which has already been caused to sectors on the list. There is now a fresh opportunity for the EU to work with the US and the other interested parties to avoid unnecessary damage to our industries and to our trade relations more generally. The UK Government will urge a swift resolution to this dispute in line with the EU's World Trade Organisation obligations and its responsibilities to African, Caribbean and Pacific suppliers.

Angola

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on current ECGD liabilities in respect of exports to Angola. [79502]

Mr. Wilson: ECGD's exposure to Angola amounts to £53.5 million. This is entirely in the form of claims paid outstanding for recovery.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he will take to ensure employees remain aware of the minimum wage after his Department's initial advertising campaign. [79382]

Mr. Ian McCartney: We are monitoring the effect of our advertising campaign and are confident that this will show that it has achieved high levels of awareness among employees. We are ensuring that copies of the detailed guidance and explanatory leaflets are widely available and the telephone helplines will continue to operate. Any future changes to the minimum wage will also be publicised.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the future of producer co-operatives in the dairy industry; and if he will make a statement. [79827]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a number of representations on the MMC's report into the supply of raw milk in Great Britain from hon. Members individually and on behalf of constituents. He has also received representations from interested parties and from members of the public.

My right hon. Friend will announce what action, if any, he intends to take when he publishes the report.

Renewable Energy Policy

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when the Government review of renewable energy will be published; [80267]

(2) if he will make a statement on the minimum targets for the Government's renewable energy policy. [80268]

Mr. Battle: I refer my hon. Friend to my written answer of 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 577–78, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) in which I announced the publication paper "New and Renewable Energy—Prospects for the 21 Century", which reports on the outcome of the Government's review of new and renewable energy policy.

The Renewables Review paper demonstrates that there is considerable potential for renewables to become a fully competitive part of UK energy supply, and to make an important contribution to secure, diverse and sustainable energy supplies in the UK. They are an essential element of a cost-effective climate change programme and will help the Government meet their environmental objectives at the least cost to the customer. Renewables play a vital role in enabling us to meet our environmental targets of reducing greenhouse gases by 12.5 per cent. by 2012, and our goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. by 2010.

The document shows that producing 10 per cent. of UK electricity from renewables appears to be feasible. The Government intend working towards a target of renewable energy providing 10 per cent. of UK electricity supplies, cost effectively, as soon as possible. I want to achieve this by 2010. However, this should not be seen as an end in itself, but a step forward on the road to making renewables a strong, world-beating industry. There are already considerable benefits of the renewables industry. The UK industry employs 3,500 people. Through creating an export drive, and by further developing the industry and the UK market, up to 45,000 jobs could be created.

This report identifies key issues and challenges which the Government and industry would need to pursue. Issues examined in the paper include: planning arrangements; opportunities for developing energy crops; and arrangements to ensure that embedded generators (those directly connected to local distribution systems, often the case with renewables producers) receive a fair price for their electricity. It seeks views on the issues raised to enable the Government to frame its future policy.

I look forward to receiving those views and plan to make a further announcement about our way forward in due course. The Government are committed to encouraging sustainable development, to ensure a better quality of life for us and our children.

Milk Market Investigation

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish his decision on the MMC report on the market for milk. [80582]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will publish the MMC's report as soon as is practicable.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment his Department has made of the proposals in Consultation Document MLX249 published by the Medicines Control Agency; if the proposals represent Government policy; and if he will make a statement. [80633]

Dr. Howells: My officials have assessed these proposals, taken on board industry's views and made representations, both orally and in writing, to the Medicines Control Agency.

We also understand that the Medicines Control Agency have consulted widely.

Presstream Service

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when Royal Mail sought his approval to increase the mailing price of the Presstream service; and what account he took in giving his approval of earlier guarantees from Royal Mail about stability of prices. [80030]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Changes to postal tariffs are primarily a matter for the Post Office in consultation with the Post Office Users' National Council (POUNC), to whom the Post Office is statutorily required to refer major proposals for comment. The proposals are formally notified to my Department at the same time as they are referred to POUNC. The most recent tariff proposals, including those for the Presstream service, were referred to POUNC on 14 January. In indicating that he was content for the proposed tariff changes to be implemented, my right hon. Friend took account of the representations received about the proposed Presstream tariff increases and the arrangements made by Royal Mail, in response to representations, to mitigate their impact. He also took into account that the increases for this service were the first since September 1993.

Chrysotile Asbestos Imports

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the tonnage of chrysotile asbestos imported into the United Kingdom in 1998; and if he will list the countries and the quantity involved. [80004]

Mr. Wilson: Chrysotile asbestos is not separately identified in the system under which United Kingdom trade is recorded. However, since 1986, trade in all other forms of asbestos has been prohibited. The figures in the following table, therefore, relate to chrysotile asbestos.

UK imports of asbestos [1] 1998

	Tonnes
Canada	1,361
South Africa	268
Zimbabwe	193
Chile	18
USA	1
World total	1,841

[1] Asbestos is defined as code 278.4 of the Standard International Trade Classification, Revision 3, (SITC Rev 3). This does not include asbestos cement and manufactures containing asbestos.

Source:
HM Customs and Excise

Caribbean Banana Growers

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that the interests of the Caribbean banana growers are recognised in the European Union negotiations on new trading arrangements. [79097]

Mr. Rooker: I have been asked to reply.

The Government will continue to take the interests of Caribbean banana growers fully into account, along with our other international commitments, in any negotiations to change the EU banana regime.

HEALTH

Pilot Projects

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the pilot projects instigated by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating the area in which each pilot took, or is taking, place. [72637]

Mr. Denham: Pilot projects instigated by the Department since 1 March 1997 are:

Personal Medical Services pilots (85):

Collingham, Nottinghamshire
Mansfield
Ransom, Nottinghamshire
Grimsby
Sheffield
Grantham
Long Eaton
Doncaster
Rotherham
Nottingham
Southport (x2)
Warrington (x3)
Liverpool (x2)
Kirkby
Irlam
Salford
Wallasey
Ormskirk
Manchester
Cleckheaton
Huddersfield
South Shields
Leeds
Newcastle-upon-Tyne (x2)
Maryport
Ashington
Morpeth
Sunderland
Hartlepool
Middlesbrough (x2)
Edgbaston, Birmingham
Coventry (x2)
Dudley
Stoke-on-Trent (x2)
Smethwick, West Midlands
Tipton, West Midlands
Stafford
Great Barr, Birmingham
Willenhall, West Midlands
Wolverhampton
Croydon
Abbey Wood, London SE2
Canterbury
Worcester Park, Surrey
Epsom
Brighton
Chertsey
East Grinstead
Sittingbourne
Morden, London SW19
Camberwell, London SE5
Lewisham, London SE13
Clapham, London SW9
Lambeth, London SE1
Hoxton, London N1
Tower Hamlets, London E1
Romford
Haringey, London N15
Marylebone, London NW1
Hounslow
Waltham Cross
Welwyn Garden City
Grays, Essex (x2)
Ruislip
St. Albans
Hemel Hempstead (x2)
Oxford
Wendover, Buckinghamshire
Christchurch, Dorset (x2)
Bournemouth (x2)
Shaftesbury
Poole
Dorchester

GP Commissioning Group pilots (39):

North Cumbria
Durham & Chester-le-Street
Langbaurgh Coast
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
North Amber Valley
North Derbyshire
North East Lincolnshire
Nottingham
Rotherham
Dunstable & Houghton Regis
Northampton
Slough
Barking & Havering
Basildon
Camden & Islington
Harlow
Harrow East and Willesden & Harlesden
Hayes & Harlington
Fulham
Redbridge & Waltham Forest
Battersea
Croydon
Dartford, Gravesham & Swanley
Kennington & Clapham
Mid Devon
North West Bristol

Portsmouth & South East Hampshire
Southampton
Halesowen
Ladywood, Birmingham
Tipton, West Midlands
Walsall
Wolverhampton
Blackburn & Darwen
Chorley & South Ribble
Stockport
Salford
West Pennine
West Wirral & Bebington

NHS Direct pilots (7):
Preston
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Milton Keynes
Dudley
Chelmsford
Nottingham
West London

Waiting List pilots (43):
Teesside
North Tyneside
West Cumbria
Sunderland
Wakefield
Gateshead & South Tyneside
Cheviot & Wansbeck
South Derbyshire
Sheffield (x2)
Leicestershire & Lincolnshire
Leicester
North Nottinghamshire
Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire & Bedfordshire
Northampton
Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow
Central Middlesex and Northwick Park
Bexley & Greenwich
Kingston & Richmond
East Surrey & Sussex
East Sussex, Brighton & Hove
West Surrey
East Kent
Gloucestershire
Somerset
North & Mid Hampshire
Wiltshire & Salisbury
Portsmouth
Devon
Southampton & South West Hampshire
Birmingham & Solihull
Shrewsbury
Walsall
Preston
Manchester
Salford
Bury & Rochdale
Stockport
Trafford
North Cheshire
Wirral
St. Helens & Knowsley
Liverpool
Barrow-in-Furness

National Booked Admission pilots (24):
Durham & Darlington
Wakefield and Pontefract
Durham, Hartlepool & North Teesside
Leicester
Sheffield
Rotherham
Buckinghamshire
Norfolk & Suffolk
Slough
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster
West London
Homerton, City and East London
Camberley
Sidcup
East Kent
Dorset
Devon
Bath
Birmingham and Solihull
Birmingham
Shrewsbury
Manchester
Liverpool
Ashton-under-Lyne

Personal Dental Services pilots (15):
Bedfordshire
Buckinghamshire
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow
East London and the City
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham
Liverpool
North Essex
Northumberland
Shropshire
South Cheshire
South Derbyshire
South Lancashire
Tees
Warwickshire

Paediatric Spontaneous Adverse Reaction Reporting pilot (1):
Trent NHS Executive Region

Pilot Chlamydia screening programme (2):
Portsmouth
Wirral

Thallium Scans

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* average, *(b)* maximum and *(c)* minimum waiting times for thallium scans (1) for each

year over the last five years at each of the nuclear medicine centres that provide this facility in the United Kingdom; [73476]

(2) in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) the Greater London area for those aged (A) 0–25 years, (B) 25–50 years and (C) over 50 years. [73475]

Mr. Denham: Information on waiting times for this procedure is not available.

Myelography

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what warnings are given to patients of the dangers of myelography. [73950]

Mr. Hutton: Patients are entitled to receive sufficient information in a way they can understand about the proposed treatments/procedures (which would include myelography), the possible alternatives, and any substantial risks, so that they can make an informed decision. Clinicians should use their skill, knowledge and experience to weigh carefully the likely benefits of any treatment or procedure against the anticipated risk and, following discussion with the patient, to exercise their clinical judgment and expertise accordingly.

Erectile Dysfunction Disorders

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current unit cost in the NHS of each accepted treatment for erectile dysfunction disorder by *(a)* prescribable drug and *(b)* other means. [76133]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available in any comparable form.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost per adult male of GP-prescribed drug treatments for erectile dysfunction disorders in *(a)* England, *(b)* each English region and *(c)* each English health authority area in the most recent complete year available. [76132]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is shown in the table.

Net ingredient cost per 1,000 adult males of drugs for erectile dysfunction disorders prescribed by General Practitioners England 1998

£

Regional Office/Health Authority	*Net ingredients cost per 1,000 males aged 18 and over*
Northern and Yorkshire	
Bradford	671
County Durham	568
East Riding	702
Gateshead and South Tyneside	730
Leeds	464
Newcastle and North Tyneside	693
North Cumbria	487
Northumberland	448
Sunderland	495
Tees	409
Wakefield	367
North Yorkshire	522
Calderdale and Kirklees	492
Average for Northern and Yorkshire	545

Net ingredient cost per 1,000 adult males of drugs for erectile dysfunction disorders prescribed by General Practitioners England 1998

£

Regional Office/Health Authority	*Net ingredients cost per 1,000 males aged 18 and over*
Trent	
Barnsley	387
North Derbyshire	321
South Derbyshire	385
Doncaster	881
Leicestershire	408
Lincolnshire	451
North Nottinghamshire	285
Nottingham	489
Rotherham	510
Sheffield	288
South Humber	518
Average for Trent	429
Anglia and Oxford	
Bedfordshire	452
Berkshire	460
Buckinghamshire	250
Cambridge and Huntingdon	396
East Norfolk	701
Northamptonshire	496
North West Anglia	539
Oxfordshire	385
Suffolk	423
Average for Anglia and Oxford	452
North Thames	
Hillingdon	573
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	491
Enfield and Haringey	470
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	319
Barking and Havering	451
Barnet	481
Brent and Harrow	562
Camden and Islington	578
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	619
East London and The City	563
North Essex	492
South Essex	429
East and North Hertfordshire	424
West Hertfordshire	493
Average for North Thames	496
South Thames	
Bexley and Greenwich	518
Bromley	446
Croydon	415
East Kent	549
West Kent	487
Kingston and Richmond	442
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	588
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	532
East Surrey	438
West Surrey	445
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	466
West Sussex	544
Average for South Thames	499
South and West	
North and Mid Hampshire	478
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	443
Southampton and South West Hampshire	552
Isle of Wight	566
Somerset	500
South and West Devon	583
Wiltshire	433

Net ingredient cost per 1,000 adult males of drugs for erectile dysfunction disorders prescribed by General Practitioners England 1998

£

Regional Office/Health Authority	Net ingredients cost per 1,000 males aged 18 and over
Avon	511
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	517
Dorset	772
North and East Devon	500
Gloucestershire	550
Average for South and West	536
West Midlands	
Birmingham	584
Coventry	630
Dudley	439
Herefordshire	273
Sandwell	451
Shropshire	541
Solihull	602
North Staffordshire	531
South Staffordshire	577
Walsall	388
Warwickshire	552
Wolverhampton	738
Worcestershire	481
Average for West Midlands	537
North West	
South Lancashire	556
Liverpool	588
Manchester	769
Morecambe Bay	490
St. Helens and Knowsley	1,062
Salford and Trafford	894
Sefton	530
Stockport	672
West Pennine	623
Bury and Rochdale	641
North Cheshire	737
South Cheshire	755
East Lancashire	458
North West Lancashire	726
Wigan and Bolton	671
Wirral	669
Average for North West	680
Average for England	525

Notes:

1. The information is from the Prescribing Analyses and Cost system (PACT) which is based on all prescriptions prescribed by General Practitioners which are dispensed.

2. The population figures used are based on the Office for National Statistics mid year resident population projections for 1998, 1996 based.

3. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of a drug which does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income.

4. Drugs used for the treatment of erectile dysfunction are defined as those in the British National Formulary paragraph 7.4.5, "Drugs for impotence".

Waiting Times

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each of the last 10 years how many patients have waited *(a)* less than 12 months, *(b)* more than 12 months and *(c)* more than 18 months for treatment in each (i) region in England and (ii) health authority. [74733]

Mr. Denham: Copies of available information on the number of patients waiting less than 12 months, 12 to 18 months and more than 18 months for hospital treatment at 31 December each year have been placed in the Library.

Accident and Emergency Wards

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency (i) admission wards and (ii) admission ward beds announced on 15 March were *(a)* additional wards and beds and *(b)* re-designated wards and beds. [77317]

Mr. Hutton: Following the announcement on 15 March 1999, regions are preparing detailed plans for the accident and emergency modernisation programme in discussion with National Health Service trusts and health authorities. A list of schemes approved by Ministers will be announced in due course.

Adoption

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were taken into long-term public care in each year from 1990 to 1998; and how many adoptions from the care system were effected in each of those years. [78322]

Mr. Hutton: Information for the years 1990 to 1998 is given in the table.

Numbers of children starting to be looked after (most of whom will have returned home during the year in question) and children adopted from care, years ending 31 March 1990 to 1998

England: Year ending 31 March	Number of children starting to be looked after	Number of children looked after and adopted during the year
1990	30,100	2,500
1991	29,300	2,400
1992[2]	not available	not available
1993	29,000	2,500
1994	31,100	2,300
1995	32,500	2,000
1996	32,100	1,900
1997	31,400	1,900
1998[3]	31,700	not available

[1] Figures for children looked after in this table exclude agreed series of short term placements but do not otherwise distinguish between children who will remain in care for relatively shorter and longer periods.

[2] Data refer to children admitted to care under previous legislation.

[3] Figures not available due to the implementation of the Children Act during this year.

[4] Figures for number of children adopted during 1997-98 not available.

Cancer Services (Funding)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the New Opportunities funding for cancer services will be allocated; what are the criteria for allocation of money under the New Opportunities Fund for cancer services; and what plans he has to increase the availability of cytotoxic drugs under this programme; [79074]

(2) what are the criteria for allocation of money under the New Opportunities Fund for cancer services; and what plans he has to increase the availability of cytotoxic drugs under this programme; [79181]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact of New Opportunities funding on NHS cancer services; and if he will make a statement. [79083]

Mr. Hutton: The New Opportunities Fund for cancer prevention, detection, treatment and care will contribute to the Government's drive to provide high quality cancer services for all and reduce cancer mortality. The New Opportunities Fund money will also help to reduce waiting times for the diagnosis and treatment of cancer by investing in replacement or additional high-tech equipment.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is leading the New Opportunities Fund initiative. £150 million has been allocated for National Health Service cancer services over the next three years. Application guidance will be available in the late Summer and bids will build on local initiatives to promote cancer prevention, improve access to screening and treatment, including the provision of new equipment, and help individuals and families to cope with the impact of cancer on their lives.

The focus of the initiative in England will be the purchase of equipment, such as breast screening mammography units, scanners and linear accelerators. There are no plans to use New Opportunities Funding for cytotoxic drugs. 80 per cent. of the total allocation in England will be used to purchase equipment. It is anticipated that a large part of the funding will be allocated in the first year. The Directions make it clear that this is a one-off catch-up exercise in order to bring provision to an even standard across the country and that equipment should only be purchased which is in addition to that planned and funded within currently approved budgets.

Herbal Medicines

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons a medicines product licence may be required for a product which is a blend of two ingredients neither of which would require a product licence, if sold separately. [79487]

Ms Jowell: A product containing two or more ingredients which, if sold separately, would not come within medicines legislation is not classified by the Medicines Control Agency as a licensable medicinal product unless it is presented for treating or preventing disease or, not being a food or toilet preparation, it may be administered with a view to restoring, correcting or modifying physiological functions in humans. However, where a herbal product—whether or not it includes non-herbal substances—is classified as a medicinal product, it will be subject to medicines legislation. Herbal remedies, accordingly, require a marketing authorisation unless they are exempt from licensing under the terms of Section 12 of the Medicines Act 1968. Section 132 of the Act makes it clear that the exemption for herbal remedies does not extend to products which contain active non-herbal substances.

Cancer Treatments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the availability of homoeopathic and herbal medicines for cancer treatments on the NHS. [79499]

Mr. Hutton: A Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services (Calman/Hine) reported that one of the general principles that should govern the provision of cancer care is that the development of cancer services should be patient centred and should take account of patients, carers and family views and preferences as well as those of professionals.

Like other forms of treatment, the availability of homeopathic and herbal medicines on the National Health Service is a matter, firstly for the clinical judgment of the clinician in respect of individual patients and, secondly, upon decisions taken at local level on how resources should best be used to meet the health needs of the local population in the context of local health implementation programmes.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Government are undertaking to improve cancer treatment provision in the UK. [79497]

Mr. Hutton: The Calman/Hine report published in 1995 set out a framework for improving the organisation and delivery of cancer services in England and Wales. Similar arrangements are in place in Scotland and Northern Ireland. A key element has been the identification of cancer units and centres and local agreements about which cancers should be treated at each individual hospital. Implementation is being supported by the subsequent publication of evidence-based guidance for improving outcomes in breast, colorectal and lung cancer. Guidance on the gynaecological cancers will be published in April 1999 and cancers of the upper gastro-intestinal tract will follow in late autumn. Over the past 18 months, we have invested £30 million in breast and colorectal cancer services to speed access to diagnosis and treatment and improve quality of care. We announced on 5 March 1999 that a further £10 million was being made available to improve lung cancer services. Targeted funding will be used to improve access to lung cancer services, augment specialist teams and improve palliative care services in a similar way to the funding made available for breast cancer services. National Health Service trusts and health authorities will be asked to submit funding proposals and detail the tangible improvements that the funding will achieve.

Our new White Paper "The new NHS" guarantees that everyone with suspected cancer will be able to see a specialist within two weeks of their general practitioner deciding that they need to be seen urgently and requesting an appointment. These arrangements have been guaranteed for everyone with suspected breast cancer by April 1999 and for all other cases of suspected cancer by 2000. A new monitoring system will be operational from April 1999 for measuring achievement of the breast cancer target. Health Authorities will demonstrate in their health improvement programmes that plans are in place to deliver quality and timely care in accordance with Calman/Hine and the White Paper target.

Full implementation will take some 10 years and national milestones for the mid implementation period 1999–2002 are currently being worked up. This includes ongoing development of national standards and work being taken forward within primary care.

CS Spray

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the review of CS spray research to be concluded; and if it will be made available to hon. Members and to the public. [79683]

Ms Jowell: The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) is continuing its considerations on CS Spray. A statement will be put in the public domain as soon as the Committee has completed its evaluation. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Mental Illness

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the increase in police time to be spent dealing with mentally disordered people if compulsory treatment outside of hospital is introduced. [79682]

Mr. Hutton: It is not possible at present to estimate the implication for the police of introducing powers to treat mentally disordered people in the community. We are awaiting the report of the expert group appointed to consider the changes necessary to mental health legislation which has been asked to consider the issue of community assessment and treatment. There are various models of community treatment orders and their report will need to consider any role the police might have in their operation.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were conveyed to hospital in 1998 *(a)* under a section of the Mental Health Act 1983 and *(b)* under a supervised discharge order. [79679]

Mr. Hutton: 24,079 people were conveyed to hospital in 1998 under a section of the Mental Health Act 1983. People conveyed to hospital under a supervised discharge order are admitted under section 3 of the Mental Health Act 1983 and are included in this figure.

Breastfeeding

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the last five years the rate of breastfeeding at (i) two weeks and (ii) four months for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each other EU country. [79592]

Ms Jowell: Rates of breastfeeding in the United Kingdom are monitored by the Quinquennial Surveys of Infant Feeding Practice. Data from the most recent in 1995 are given for the countries of the United Kingdom in the table. Other European Union countries do not carry out representative surveys of breastfeeding practice.

Prevalence of Breastfeeding 1995 (per cent. of mothers)

Age of infant	*England and Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*
2 weeks	54	44	52
4 months	28	24	12

Source:
Infant Feeding 1995 London: The Stationery Office, 1997

Radiography Treatment (Royal Shrewsbury Hospital)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to inform the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital of his decision on the provision of a second linear accelerator for radiography treatment; and if he will make a statement. [79593]

Mr. Denham: The National Health Service Executive West Midlands Regional Office is carefully considering a business case and hopes to make a decision as soon as possible. The prime consideration will be establishing a safe and sustainable service. Work currently taking place on developing a national framework for radiotherapy services as well as a regional cancer strategy will inform the decision.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further representations he has received on help for patients with hepatitis C since 28 July; and if he will make a statement. [79719]

Mr. Hutton: Since 28 July 1998, hon. Members have asked 18 Parliamentary Questions (in addition to this one) and we have received 140 letters about help for people infected with hepatitis C through National Health Service treatment.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79648]

Ms Jowell: This information requested is not available in a collated form centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, all official meetings are conducted in accordance with the *Ministerial Code*, the *Civil Service Code* and *Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists*. In order to preserve confidentiality it is not the normal practice of Government to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies. The requirements of the *Ministerial Code* also apply to Parliamentary Private Secretaries when attending meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

Mental Health Institutions (Deaths)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 5, on Mental Health Institutions (Deaths), if the Health Service Guidelines (92)8 issued in January 1992

include (i) guidance on the timescale and (ii) a maximum delay for the notification of relatives following the death of a patient in hospital. [80560]

Mr. Hutton: Health Service Guidance (92)8 states that arrangements for informing relatives following the death of a patient in hospital should be a matter of urgency. Specific procedures are for National Health Service trusts to decide.

Restraint Techniques

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *373*, on restraint techniques, if his Department has issued *(a)* guidelines and *(b)* advice to mental health units on the use of control and restraint techniques. [80559]

Mr. Hutton: No advice or guidance has been issued. However, the Royal College of Nurses Education Institute has recently validated specific programmes and the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting has also validated an education programme of the management of violence. It is for each National Health Service trust to ensure that its staff are appropriately trained.

Dietary Supplements

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce the outcome of the consultation on MLX249; and if he will make a statement. [79079]

Ms Jowell: We are currently considering the responses received to the consultation and will make an announcement in due course.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations *(a)* he and *(b)* the Medicines Control Agency have received in response to the Agency's consultation document MLX249; how many and what percentage of those representations opposed the proposals; and if he will make a statement. [80632]

Ms Jowell: Records held do not distinguish between representations received by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Medicines Control Agency. We have received 700 letters from Members of Parliament and 740 representations from other interested bodies and individuals. In addition, a recent campaign encouraging the public to write to my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health has generated in excess of 2,000 letters. Three representations broadly support the proposals. The remainder are critical of the proposals to some degree.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review medicines licensing legislation to give greater protection to the continued availability of vitamin, mineral and herbal supplements and blends thereof; and what discussions he has had with the European Commission. [80634]

Ms Jowell: For the Government's position on regulatory arrangements which apply to herbal medicines I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on 26 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *426–27*. We have no additional plans at present to review the application of medicines legislation with respect to the licensing of vitamins, mineral and herbal supplements and blends thereof, and we have had no discussions with the European Commission on this issue.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has received a copy of the report commissioned by the European Commission on the market in herbal remedies; what discussions he has had with the European Commission on EU legislation in this area; and if he will make a statement. [80635]

Ms Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on 26 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *426–27*. The Medicines Control Agency's discussions to date with the European Commission strengthen our preliminary view that the Commission's recent proposals to amend the Annex to Directive 75/318 European Economic Community would have a relatively limited impact in relation to herbal remedies in the United Kingdom.

MMR Vaccinations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the last five years for which information is available the serious adverse reactions to vaccines containing components against mumps, measles or rubella; if he will list the trial products which have been withdrawn; and if he will make a statement. [80035]

Ms Jowell: Drug Analysis Prints, listing all serious suspected reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1998 for vaccines containing components against mumps, measles or rubella, have been placed in the Library along with an information sheet to aid interpretation.

There have been no trial products withdrawn or licences for these vaccines suspended or revoked in the last five years.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each of the years since 1969 in which vaccinations or revised vaccinations were introduced for mumps, measles and rubella. [80032]

Ms Jowell: Measles vaccine for infants was introduced into the United Kingdom immunisation programme in 1968. Rubella immunisation was introduced in 1970 for girls aged 10 to 14 and non-immune women. Single antigen mumps vaccine has never been a part of the United Kingdom's immunisation programme. Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine for children aged 12 to 15 months was introduced in October 1988; this replaced single antigen measles vaccine. Routine rubella immunisation for girls aged 10 to 14 was discontinued in October 1995. A second dose of MMR vaccine at pre-school entry was introduced in October 1996. In addition, a special, one-off immunisation campaign of children aged 5 to 16 was conducted in November 1994 with measles/rubella vaccine to avert a measles epidemic.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list vaccines licensed since 1 February 1987 for mumps, measles and rubella, or a combination

of these, indicating for each product *(a)* the date on which a licence was granted, *(b)* the conditions for which it was licensed and *(c)* if the product licence is current. [80036]

Ms Jowell: The available information listing the vaccines licensed since February 1987 and still current is shown in the table.

Product Name	*Date of Grant*
Pluserix MMR Vaccine Injection with Diluent	17 June 1988
Rubavax Rubella Live Vaccine	18 September 1989
Measavax Vaccine Injection	18 September 1989
Immravax Measles Mumps Rubella Live Attenuated Vaccine Injection	18 September 1989
Rubilin - Rubella Vaccine Live BP	28 February 1992
Immravax/Measles, Mumps and Rubella Vaccine Live BP	18 October 1993
Rimevax Measles Vaccine	25 October 1993
Mevilin-L Measles Vaccine Live BP	6 January 1994
Eolarix Vaccine Injection	22 July 1994
Merieux Measles and Rubella Vaccine Injection	1 September 1994
Measavax Vaccine 1000TCID50/Dose	13 October 1994
Rubavax Injection [At Least] 100TCID50	14 October 1994
Almevax Rubella Vaccine 1000TCID50/Dose	2 November 1994
MSD Meruvax II Vaccine	2 November 1994
Mumpsvax Lyophilised Powder for Injection 20000IU	2 November 1994
Ervevax Rubella Vaccine Live EP RA 27/3 Strain 1000TCID50	2 November 1994
Pluserix MMR Vaccine Injection	9 February 1995
Pariorix Vaccine	20 February 1995
MSD Attenuvax Vaccine Injection [At least] 1000TCID50	24 March 1995
M-M-R II Vaccine Injection	24 March 1995
Meruvax II Vaccine 1000 TCID50	7 April 1995
Attenuvax Injection	7 June 1995
M-M-R Vaccine Injection	1 March 1996
Mumpsvax Vaccine Injection 20000TCID50/Dose	1 March 1996
Priorix Vaccine Injection	4 December 1997

Indicates that the product licence has been cancelled

Information relating to the conditions for which the products were licensed will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what announcements have been made by his Department since 2 May 1997 relating to vaccination against mumps, measles and rubella; and on which date each of these announcements was made. [80033]

Ms Jowell: Two announcements about measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) vaccine have been issued by the Department in the form of press releases from the then Chief Medical Officer, Sir Kenneth Calman. The first press release was issued on 12 March 1998 and stated that there was no scientific evidence to support giving measles, mumps and rubella vaccines in separate doses. The second was issued on 24 March 1998 and gave the Chief Medical Officer's conclusions following the meeting of an independent expert scientific group convened by the Medical Research Council (MRC). The group looked at the suggested link between measles, measles vaccine or MMR immunisation and either Crohn's disease or autism. Sir Kenneth said in the press release

"Based on the views of the experts at the MRC meeting, and on previous material that I have studied, I have concluded there is no link between measles, measles vaccine or MMR immunisation and either Crohn's Disease or autism"

Copies of the press releases are available in the Library.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many suspected adverse reactions to mumps, rubella and measles vaccines there were in the last five years for which figures are available. [80034]

Ms Jowell: Suspected adverse reactions reports to measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine are given in the table:

Numbers of suspected adverse reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines from 1 January 1994 to 31 December 1998 for MMR vaccine in the United Kingdom

Year	*All suspected adverse reactions (serious and non-serious) where MMR vaccine was indicated as a suspect drug*	*Number of reports where MMR vaccine was indicated as suspect drug*
1994	224	140
1995	237	129
1996	242	141
1997	331	209
1998	232	145

A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the vaccine. Each report relates to one patient. Patients may have more than one suspected reaction and the number of reactions given exceeds the number of patients affected as seen above. The number of reports is variable due to retrospective reporting.

Chemotherapy Patients (Wigs)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to review the conditions attaching to the prescribing of wigs for patients receiving chemotherapy treatment; [79808]

(2) what conditions his Department attaches to the prescribing of wigs for *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* day-care patients receiving chemotherapy treatment. [79807]

Mr. Hutton: A wig may be provided as part of National Health Service treatment if it is considered to be clinically necessary. As with the supply of medication, patients will qualify for free wigs if they are hospital in-patients.

Day patients or out-patients may qualify for full or partial exemption from charges on income grounds. If patients are in receipt of Income Support, Disability Working Allowance, Family Credit or Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, they will be entitled to wigs free of charge. People who are not automatically exempt from charges may claim help with health costs through the NHS Low Income Scheme. We have no current plans to review these arrangements.

Patient Examinations

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to remind hospital doctors of the necessity of washing their hands after examining patients. [80047]

Ms Jowell: Health Circular 1999/049, which was issued to the National Health Service on 5 March this year, referred to and enclosed a copy of advice on handwashing produced by representatives of the relevant professional bodies. Copies of both the Health Circular and the advice are available in the Library.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the salaries paid to speech and language therapists in the NHS; who advises him on such salaries; what discussions he had with speech and language therapists before deciding on their pay settlement for 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [80049]

Mr. Denham: In deciding pay for National Health Service staff, the Government need to take account of fairness, affordability, the prevailing economic climate and recruitment and retention. We have offered a pay increase of 2.8 per cent. to most NHS staff in 1999–2000, plus additional increases for staff groups where there is evidence of recruitment and retention problems. Discussions with the representatives of speech and language therapists as with representatives of other staff groups are continuing.

Advice from NHS management, including speech and language therapy service managers, is that there are no recruitment and retention problems with speech and language therapy. Their basic pay rates have increased by between 158 per cent. (minimum) and 170 per cent. (maximum) since 1984, more than those for any other NHS professional staff group.

Negotiations are also in progress to resolve speech and language therapists' outstanding equal pay claims and to align the pay of clinical psychologists, health care pharmacists and speech and language therapists for the future.

Quality Protects Plans

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the outcome of the evaluation of the Quality Protects management action plans submitted to his Department by local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [80518]

Mr. Hutton: All local authorities submitted their Quality Protects Management Action Plans (MAPs) to the Department by the end of January. The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) have now completed their evaluation of the MAPs and we have considered their findings. I am pleased to announce that all the MAPs have reached an acceptable standard, and I have written today to local authority chief executives to confirm that they will receive payment of their allocation of the children's special grant for 1999–2000, subject to Parliamentary approval. We shall be publishing a national overview report, summarising the key findings from the evaluation of the MAPs and identifying the development needs which will be addressed over the three years of the Quality Protects programme. The team of Quality Protects Regional Development Workers in partnership with SSI will be assisting local authorities in their work to deliver the high quality children's social services which the Government require.

Pharmacy Remuneration

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the date of settlement of pharmacy remuneration negotiations for each year since 1994 and in each case the period covered; and when he plans to settle the next remuneration negotiations. [80101]

Mr. Denham: Pharmacy remuneration negotiations were settled on the following dates for the following financial years:

Financial year	*Date*
1994–95	4 May 1994
1995–96	28 June 1995
1996–97	21 October 1996
1997–98	7 October 1997
1998–99	30 November 1998

We hope to settle this year's remuneration negotiations as soon as possible.

Military District Hospitals

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 18 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *803–04*, which health authorities are to be compensated for the loss of free provision of MOD staff, indicating the amounts involved in each case. [80618]

Mr. Denham: The following health authorities are to be compensated for the loss of free provision of MOD staff for 1999/2000:

	£
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	348,000
South and West Devon	1,235,000
North and Mid Hampshire	309,000
West Surrey	926,000
North West Anglia	666,000

TREASURY

Excise Duty and VAT (Fuel)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the rates of *(a)* excise duty and *(b)* VAT on petroleum in each member state of the European Union, the United States of America and Canada, taking account of the changes in his Budget. [76568]

Ms Hewitt: The United Kingdom rates shown are those applying since the Budget on 9 March 1999, published in Customs & Excise Budget Notice 6/99.

For other European Union member states the figures relate to January 1999, as shown in the Oil Bulletin published by the European Commission. The rates for the United States of America and Canada are for the fourth quarter of 1998 from Prices and Taxes Table 1, published by the International Energy Agency.

	Leaded Petrol		*Unleaded Petrol*	
	Excise Duty pence per litre	*VAT per cent*	*Excise Duty pence per litre*	*VAT per cent*
Austria	NA	NA	29.19	20.0
Belgium	39.83	21.0	35.73	21.0
Denmark	NA	NA	35.68	25.0
Finland	NA	NA	39.43	22.0
France	44.85	20.6	41.52	20.6
Germany	38.90	16.0	35.80	16.0
Greece	25.92	18.0	22.44	18.0
Ireland	32.22	21.0	26.68	21.0
Italy	40.74	20.0	38.16	20.0
Luxembourg	28.13	15.0	24.46	12.0
Netherlands	41.31	17.5	41.33	17.5
Portugal	33.21	17.0	35.12	17.0
Spain	28.51	16.0	26.18	16.0
Sweden	NA	NA	34.30	25.0
United Kingdom	52.85	17.5	47.21	17.5
United States of America	NA	NA	6.12	
Canada	NA	NA	10.45	

Notes:

NA: Leaded petrol is not available.

The United States of America does not have a tax comparable to VAT. The federal excise and provincial sales taxes in Canada vary for each of the ten provinces, therefore the rate of excise tax in the table is an average of all the rates used. The average sales tax in Canada is 1.4 pence per litre.

The exchange rates used to convert foreign tax rates into sterling for the European Union member states are those published by the European Commission for 11 January 1999. Those for the United States of America and Canada are for January 1999, taken from the Office for National Statistics publication, "Financial Statistics, February 1999 edition", table 7.1A.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the rates of *(a)* excise duty and *(b)* VAT on (i) diesel and (ii) ultra-low sulphur diesel in each member state of the European Union, the United States of America and Canada, taking account of the changes in his Budget. [76572]

Ms Hewitt: The United Kingdom rates shown are those applying since the Budget on 9 March 1999, published in Customs and Excise Budget Notice 6/99.

For other European Union member states the figures relate to January 1999, as shown in the Oil Bulletin published by the European Commission. The rates for the United States of America and Canada are for the fourth quarter of 1998 from Prices and Taxes Table 1, published by the International Energy Agency.

	Excise Duty Pence per litre	*Diesel VAT Percentage*
Austria	20.41	20.0
Belgium	20.43	21.0
Denmark	21.67	25.0
Finland	21.46	22.0
France	26.87	20.6
Germany	22.33	16.0
Greece	18.07	18.0
Ireland	23.25	21.0
Italy	28.40	20.0
Luxembourg	17.81	15.0
Netherlands	24.37	17.5
Portugal	20.80	17.0
Spain	19.01	16.0
Sweden	20.51	25.0
United Kingdom	50.21	17.5
United States of America	7.03	
Canada	7.10	

Notes:

1. The excise duty rate in the United Kingdom for low sulphur diesel is 47.21 pence per litre and the VAT rate is 17.5%. Rates of excise duty and VAT on low sulphur diesel are not available for the other countries of the European Union, United States of America and Canada.

2. The United States of America does not have a tax comparable to VAT. The average sales tax in Canada is 1.4 pence per litre.

3. The exchange rates used to convert foreign tax into sterling for the European Union member states are those published by the European Commission for 11 January 1999. Those for the United States of America and Canada are for January 1999, taken from the Office for National Statistics publication 'Financial Statistics, February 1999 edition, table 7.1A.

Civil Servants (Appraisal)

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the appraisal performance markings awarded to civil servants in 1998 for *(a)* each agency in his Department and *(b)* the Department broken down by (i) grade, (ii) gender, (iii) ethnicity, (iv) part-time/full-time working and (v) disability; and for (1) each agency and (2) the Department whether the Cabinet Office's four fifths rule for detecting potential adverse impact was applied to the appraisal markings of civil servants in the 1998 report round. [78143]

Ms Hewitt: HM Treasury's appraisal year runs from 1 February to 31 January. The performance markings awarded in 1998 therefore apply to the 1997 98 appraisal year.

(1) Breakdown by grade

Below Senior Civil Service (SCS)

	Box A	*Box B*	*Box C*	*Box D*	*Box E*
A	3	10	31	12	0
B	6	51	76	51	0
C	4	24	68	22	3
D	8	49	107	24	1
E	12	44	75	29	0

SCS (To preserve anonymity, these markings cannot be provided by grade)

Box 1	*Box 2+*	*Box 2*	*Box 3+*	*Box 3*	*Box 4*	*Box 5*
6	16	30	16	0	0	0

(ii) Gender

Below SCS

	Box A	*Box B*	*Box C*	*Box D*	*Box E*
Female	12	86	162	56	1
Male	21	92	195	82	3

SCS

	Box 1	*Box 2+*	*Box 2*	*Box 3+*	*Box 3*	*Box 4*	*Box 5*
Female	0	3	6	3	0	0	0
Male	6	13	24	13	0	0	0

(iii) Ethnicity

Below SCS

	Box A	*Box B*	*Box C*	*Box D*	*Box E*
Ethnic minority	0	20	38	32	0
White	29	143	286	92	4
Unknown	4	15	33	14	0

SCS

The number of ethnic minority staff in the Senior Civil Service is too small to allow an anonymous breakdown of markings.

(iv) Part-time/full-time working

Below SCS

	Box A	*Box B*	*Box C*	*Box D*	*Box E*
Part-time	1	6	19	8	0
Full-time	32	172	338	130	4

SCS

The number of part-time staff in the Senior Civil Service is too small to allow an anonymous breakdown of markings.

(v) Disability

Below SCS

	Box A	*Box B*	*Box C*	*Box D*	*Box E*
Disabled	1	4	13	4	0
Not disabled	32	174	344	134	4

SCS

The number of disabled staff in the Senior Civil Service is too small to allow an anonymous breakdown of markings.

The Cabinet Office's four fifths rule was not applied to the 1997–98 appraisal markings. However, the Department's appraisal system will be reviewed in a wider equality audit in the Spring.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what environmental impact assessment was carried out on the £100 winter payment announced in the Budget. [78887]

Ms Hewitt: Table 5.1 of the 1999 Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report and Financial Statement and Budget Report contains an appraisal of those Budget measures which have a significant impact on the environment or whose aim is primarily environmental. The increase in the winter payment was not primarily an environmental measure, nor do we expect it to have a significant impact on the environment.

Dividend Tax Credits

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the projected revenue implications in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 of the abolition of dividend tax credits of non-taxpaying pensioners *(a)* on the assumption that savers fully switch into ISAs and *(b)* on the assumption that there is no switching. [79087]

Ms Hewitt: To correct a bias in the tax system against the retention of profits for investment, payable tax credits on dividends paid to individuals have been withdrawn from 5 April 1999. The potential revenue impact of withdrawing payable tax credits from non-taxpaying pensioners after 5 April is about £25 million a year. The effect will, however, be reduced to the extent that investors who switched their investments into PEPs before 5 April this year, or into ISAs after that date, or into interest bearing investments on which non-taxpayers can reclaim tax deducted at source on interest paid. As a result the effect could be very much less than £25 million a year.

Taxation (Motorists)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further plans he has to transfer taxation on motorists from vehicle excise duty to petrol; and if he will make a statement. [78915]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 March 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent Budget statement details current policy on vehicle taxation.

Euro

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *808*, if sterling will enter the single currency at *(a)* a lower level than the present exchange rate, *(b)* a higher level than the present exchange rate or *(c)* the present exchange rate; and if the rate will be maintained for two years before entry. [79404]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's position on the exchange rate of sterling was set out in my previous answers of 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *80*.

Income Tax (Pensioners)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *256*, concerning the 10 pence tax rate, what factors he took into account when deciding not to extend the 10 pence rate to the savings income of people of pensionable age. [79268]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* Most savers continue to enjoy the benefit of the lower rate of 20p on their savings which are already treated favourably and the introduction of the individual savings account means that all savers—including pensioners—can invest substantial amounts tax-free. The new Pensioner Bonds announced in the Budget offer pensioners the security of a guaranteed income but with greater flexibility by giving them greater access to their savings and formed part of a wider package for pensioners worth £1 billion.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *256*, concerning the 10p tax rate, what estimate he has made of the cost of applying the 10p rate to the savings income of people of pensionable age; and how many people would benefit. [79269]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* Pensioners benefited from a package worth £1 billion a year in the Budget, including measures like the minimum income guarantee, winter fuel allowance and the minimum tax guarantee. It is estimated that if the 10p rate applied to savings income about 950,000 people of pensionable age would be affected, at a cost of around £55 million.

Diesel Fuel Duty

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the factors behind his decision to raise diesel fuel duty at a higher rate than petrol duty; and if he will make a statement. [79542]

Ms Hewitt: The main factors behind the decision announced in the 1998 Budget to move to a fairer taxation of diesel relative to petrol are the higher energy and carbon contents of diesel, and the adverse affect that the use of diesel has on local air quality, caused by the high levels of particulates and nitrogen oxide emissions from diesel use.

However, following the 1999 Budget the duty rate on ultra low sulphur diesel is the same as unleaded petrol. Ultra low sulphur diesel is now over 40 per cent. of the diesel market and some industry sources predict that this will rise to 100 per cent. before the end of the year.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the agenda for the ECOFIN Council on 16 to 18 April. [79575]

Ms Hewitt: The ECOFIN meeting on 16–18 April is an Informal, and therefore has no formal agenda.

Bus Employees Superannuation Trust

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department has spent on legal fees relating to the Bus Employees Superannuation Trust, *(a)* in total and *(b)* in connection with the High Court hearing on 1 March. [79540]

Mr. Milburn: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is responsible for issues in relation to the Bus Employees Superannuation Trust. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today, *Official Report*, column *58*, by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), which provides details of expenditure by that Department.

Historical Records

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received the Registrar General's report on options for improving the system of access to historical records; and if he will make a statement on the report. [79718]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) on 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *286*.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79639]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which the Prime Minister gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*.

Credit Unions

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce legislation to raise the maximum permitted deposit with a credit union. [79694]

Ms Hewitt: We have no current plans to do so.

Departmental Investment Strategies

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to publish the Summary of Departmental Investment Strategies in the White Paper, Public Services for the Future: Modernisation, Reform, Accountability, (Cm. 4181). [80717]

Mr. Milburn: Departmental Investment Strategies (DISs) set out how the additional resources allocated to finance capital projects in the Comprehensive Spending Review will be managed in order to deliver the Government's objectives. DISs also provide a statement of how Departments make the best use of their existing asset base. Each Department has included a summary of its DIS in its Departmental Report and has made arrangements for the full text of their DIS to be published.

The Government today published a document entitled "Departmental Investment Strategies: A Summary" which provides an overview of the DISs published by Departments. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the annual cost of extending the application of the 10p tax rate to include income from investment; and if he will make a statement. [77685]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 19 March 1999]:* The 10p starting rate has been introduced to improve work incentives and help make work pay. Income from investment is already taxed generously. Most savers will continue to enjoy the benefit of the lower rate at 20p on their savings rather than the basic rate at 23p (22p from April 2000). And our introduction of Individual Savings Accounts in April this year means all savers can investment substantial amounts tax-free each year.

The cost of extending 10p rate band to include income from investment would be £85 million for 1999–2000.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief (Scotland)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost of mortgage tax relief in Scotland in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98; and what it is estimated to be for 1998–99. [78214]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost of mortgage interest relief in Scotland is estimated to be £180 million in 1996–97 and £200 million in 1997–98. These estimates are based on the regional distribution of the cost of mortgage interest relief from analysis of the Family Expenditure Surveys up to 1996–97. The estimates for 1997–98 are projections based on applying the same regional distribution as in 1996–97 to the total figure for 1997–98. It is not possible to provide reliable estimates below the United Kingdom level for 1998–99.

Personal Taxation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the work carried out by his Department since his answer of 5 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *331–34*, on taxation, in order to improve the quality of information on the personal tax payments for typical families. [78243]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 23 March 1999]:* Estimating the impact of indirect taxes is imprecise as spending patterns vary widely between households with the same composition and income, with the consumption of the majority of goods and services far from universal. For example, only around one third of adults are smokers, just over half the adult population are in households paying vehicle excise duty and around 10 per cent. of households pay air passenger duty. This can be contrasted with direct taxes and benefits where at specified earnings and for particular household types there is a known benefit entitlement or tax liability. Treasury will keep under review what meaningful information on the indirect tax burden can be produced.

Additional Person's Allowance

Ms Buck: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of eligible single-parent households claimed the additional person's allowance in each of the last five years. [79041]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Corporation Tax

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of numbers of the companies which will pay corporation tax at *(a)* 10 per cent. and *(b)* a marginal rate of 22.5 per cent. [79080]

Dawn Primarolo: Around 270,000 small and growing companies will pay less tax on profits as a result of the Chancellor's proposal to introduce a new 10 per cent. rate of corporation tax from 1 April 2000. Around 150,000 companies will pay corporation tax at 10 per cent. on profits of up to £10,000. Around 120,000 companies with profits between £10,000 and £50,000 will pay tax at an average rate of between 10 per cent. and the small companies' rate (20 per cent. from 1 April 1999) and have a lower tax bill as a result. This represents tax at 10 per cent. on the first £10,000 of profit and tax at 22.5 per cent. on the amount by which profits exceed £10,000 (with a 20 per cent. small companies' rate of corporation tax).

Working Families Tax Credit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what accounting convention underlies the treatment of working families' tax credit as a tax reduction; and when the Government adopted that convention. [79088]

Dawn Primarolo: The Working Families Tax Credit will be part of the income tax system. It will be administered by Inland Revenue as a credit of income tax. And it will be perceived by recipients, who will receive a higher post-tax pay packet as a result, as a credit of income tax. Accordingly, in the presentation of Government receipts in the Financial Statement and Budget Report and elsewhere, the Working Families Tax Credit is treated as an income tax credit, and netted off from gross income tax receipts in the calculation of aggregate net taxes and social security contributions. This treatment of the Working Families Tax Credit was adopted in the March 1998 Financial Statement and Budget Report, and was explained in paragraph B59.

714 Certificates

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the average annual total tax liability of holders of 714 certificates for each of the last three years. [79720]

Dawn Primarolo: The average annual liability to income tax, of individual 714-holding subcontractors in the year 1995–96, was £1,800. Figures for later years are not yet available.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *667*, on the Social Security Committee on which public interest grounds under paragraph (1) section (IV) of the Ministerial Code he declined to give the information requested by the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green in the question answered on 19 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *857*. [80145]

Mr. Gordon Brown: As I explained in my answer of 30 March, I gave the hon. Member a detailed account of the position in my answer of 16 March.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Export Controls

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she *(a)* was first consulted about and *(b)* received the completed strategic export controls annual report. [79714]

Clare Short: My Department was involved from an early stage in discussion on the format and content of the Annual Report. I was informed about the proposed report in June 1998 and saw the completed report on publication.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what levels of aid her Department has given to those countries listed in the Strategic Export Controls Annual Report. [79711]

Clare Short: The latest figures can be found in Table 7 of *Statistics on International Development*, a copy of which is held in the Library of the House. No country breakdown is available for Pacific countries as bilateral assistance to the Pacific is provided under a single regional programme. Assistance to Ascension Island is included in St. Helena and Dependencies. All other countries listed in the Strategic Export Controls Annual Report, but not in *Statistics on International Development*, do not receive development assistance from my Department.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contribution her Department made to the strategic export controls annual report. [79713]

Clare Short: My Department was consulted during the drafting stages and contributed on areas of specific interest in line with its policy responsibilities.

Non-governmental Organisations

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will state the value and percentages of her Department's 1996–97 total expenditure which were dispersed to *(a)* northern non-Governmental organisations, *(b)* southern non-Governmental organisations and *(c)* other civil society organisations taking into account all forms of aid her Department employs. [79715]

Clare Short: In 1996–97 the Department for International Development (DFID) expenditure through UK NGOs was £167 million which represented 15 per cent. of the bilateral programme and 8 per cent. of total expenditure. Information on spending through overseas NGOs and other civil society organisations is not held separately but is included in DFID's bilateral country programme expenditure.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* she, *(b)* her officials, *(c)* her advisers and *(d)* her PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79646]

Clare Short: I refer to an answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*. The Ministerial Code also applies to Parliamentary Private secretaries when attending any meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what environmental appraisals of policy her Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79620]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development (DFID) policies for assistance to developing countries are set out in a number of public policy documents. These include: Country Strategy Papers (CSP's), which set out how DFID intends to achieve UK development objectives in the country concerned; Institutional Strategy Papers (ISPs), which detail how DFID will work with institutions such as the EU and UN, and sectoral strategy papers, including the DFID Policy Statement on the Environment, which was published in December 1998.

These policy documents are not subject to discrete environmental appraisals. They are developed by multidisciplinary teams, including environment advisers, and take account of the positive and negative environmental impacts of the policies concerned, making use of a range of technical assessments of environmental conditions in developing countries. Eighteen CSPs and four ISPs were produced in 1998–99.

Montserrat

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what advice she is currently giving to citizens of Montserrat contemplating returning to the island. [80385]

Mr. Foulkes: An information note has been prepared by the Government of Montserrat, describing the conditions currently existing on the island. In the UK, this will be available from the Montserrat Government UK Office, the Montserrat Community Support Trust and other Montserratian community groups. It will also be included with the application forms for people wishing to apply for assistance under the Evacuee Return Air Fare Scheme.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many citizens of Montserrat have returned to the island from *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* elsewhere in the last 12 months. [80386]

Mr. Foulkes: The Government of Montserrat estimate that the population has increased by approximately 1,300 in the last 12 months. This figure includes a significant number of regional migrant workers. The Government of Montserrat do not collect data on the origin of returning citizens. Information on citizens returning from the UK is not held by the UK Government.

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the implications for her Department of the Macpherson inquiry recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [80539]

Mr. Foulkes: None of the 70 recommendations contained in Chapter 47 of the Macpherson report falls directly within our Department's remit. However, the report has been examined to assess whether there are any indirect implications.

We are fully committed to delivering the values set in its equal opportunities policy. It has accepted the Commission for Racial Equality's Leadership Challenge and the Charter for Action on Improving the Representation of Ethnic Minorities in the Senior Civil Service, and additional staff resources have recently been allocated to the Unit responsible for these matters.

The Department maintains strict policies aimed at avoiding all forms of discrimination and a recent audit of recruitment systems carried out for the Civil Service Commissioners described these as commendable. DFID has participated in public events aimed at promoting the Civil Service as a career for members of the ethnic minorities. We also promote our equal opportunities policy through training, and other forms of positive action are to be developed with this aim. Through the publication of ethnic monitoring data we seek to account publicly for our performance in the field of employment.

More widely, over the last two years, the Department has made important changes aimed at integrating the staff it engages overseas closely into its structures and management processes and affording them access to employment protection procedures by administrative action.

Our White Paper, "Eliminating World Poverty" underlined the importance the Government attach to increasing development awareness in the UK. Ethnic minorities are represented on the Development Awareness Working group, whose terms of reference explicitly require the Group to advise on how ethnic and religious groups can be properly covered.

We established a Development Policy Forum last year to enable individuals and representatives of groups from all parts of society, including ethnic minorities, to share thinking and ideas for development and draw on their wealth of knowledge and experience. We had a very useful consultation with the Commission for Racial Equality on suitable representatives for the Forum's Steering Committee and instructed the ten organising committees in the home counties and the English regions to ensure that ethnic minorities were properly represented. We will be continuing with this initiative in future years and will be looking for continuing active participation from ethnic minority representatives.

Sri Lanka (NGOs)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the withdrawal from Sri Lanka during the past three years of non-governmental organisations engaged in humanitarian work. [80438]

Clare Short: We support several non-governmental organisations which provide relief and rehabilitation to those affected by the conflict in Sri Lanka. These include Oxfam, Save the Children Fund and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

I am aware of only one organisation having withdrawn from Sri Lanka in recent years. Peace Brigades International, a human rights organisation helping non violent activists, withdrew in April 1998 because it felt unable to carry out its mandate effectively.

European Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 when her Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee unofficial texts of draft European legislation. [80551]

Clare Short: No unofficial texts have been made available by my Department to the European Scrutiny Committee.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 her Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee council working documents. [80544]

Clare Short: Since May 1997 my Department has made available the following Council working documents:

Date	*Title*
1997	
July	Resolution of the Council on Coherence
December	Resolution – Microfinancing
1998	
May	Conclusions – Follow up to the December 1995 resolution on Gender
May	Conclusions – Follow up to the 1993 resolution on the fight against Poverty
July	Human Rights regulation based on article 235
July	Human Rights regulation based on article 130
October	Draft guidelines for strengthening operational co-ordination between the Community and member states in the field of development co-operation
November	Presidency proposal for the resolution on indigenous peoples within the framework of the development co-operation of the Community and member states
	Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of members states on the role of development co-operation in strengthening peace building, conflict prevention and resolution

Swaziland

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) of 23 April 1998, *Official Report*, column 680, on Swaziland, what efforts are being made by her Department to further participation by women in political institutions in Swaziland. [79940]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for International Development financed gender awareness training for members of Swaziland's parliament two years ago. We have not been asked specifically to help increase participation by women in Swazi political institutions but our future partnership with Swaziland, currently under discussion with Swazi partners, will aim to help women's groups advance women's legal and property rights.

MED Programmes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the Court of Auditors reports into the MED programmes of the European Union; and if she will make a statement. [80003]

Mr. Foulkes: The only Court of Auditors report into the MEDA programmes during this Government was Special Report No. 1/98 in respect of bilateral financial and technical co-operation with non-member Mediterranean countries. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State submitted and explanatory memorandum on this report to Parliament's European scrutiny committees on 23 April 1998.

The Government share criticisms of the MED programme made in this report, and in previous Court of Auditors reports into the MED programmes' structural adjustment support measures (1995) and decentralised co-operation (1996), and in the report by the Committee of Independent Experts published in March this year.

The MED regulation expires at the end of 1999. In negotiations on its successor, the Government are seeking to improve the poverty focus and quality of management of the programmes. These reports have informed our approach.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list each of the new responsibilities which she will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80413]

Mr. Foulkes: The Treaty of Amsterdam will have minimal impact on the responsibilities of the Department and its staffing. As far as EU bodies are concerned, there will be an increased role for the European Parliament, following the amendment to Article 130u-y of the Treaty to extend the co-decision procedure to cover regulations agreed under these articles. This will include those for humanitarian aid, food aid, assistance to NGOs and environmental projects. The strengthening of the Common Foreign and Security Policy will also have some implications for DFID, for example in so far as it relates to assistance to third countries.

Refugees (Kosovo)

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she plans to give to help *(a)* refugees from Kosovo and *(b)* the receiving nations. [79612]

Clare Short: Since 29 March we have committed £20 million to aid Kosovo Albanian refugees. Of this sum £6.4 million has already been allocated to priority needs, 24 per cent. specifically for activities in Albania, 22 per cent. for Macedonia and 54 per cent. for the region as a whole. Our share of EC contributions so far is an additional £2.9 million.

We will continue to commit our resources to achieve the most effective possible results. Our decisions will be informed by our recent missions to the regions.

WALES

Clinical Negligence Claims

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cost of clinical negligence claims against the NHS in each region in Wales in each year since 1994–95. [76909]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The information is not centrally available in the format requested. However, the cost of cases which include clinical negligence claims is in the following table.

£000

	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98
NHS Trusts				
Bridgend and District	0	4	105	8
Cardiff Community	—	49	99	2
Carmarthen and District	0	0	24	28
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	4	2	6	12
Clwydian Community Care	0	0	0	-
Derwen	0	0	1	—
East Glamorgan	0	1	0	110
Glan Clwyd	0	24	5	387
Glan Hafren	5	108	3	225
Glan Y Mor	—	—	437	0
Gwent Community	0	0	0	9

£000

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98
Gwynedd Community	0	0	0	0
Gwynedd Hospitals	0	20	12	1
Llandough Hospital	3	0	58	35
Llanelli Dinefwr	0	40	0	14
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	0	0	0	13
Morriston Hospital	0	5	21	28
Nevill Hall	0	0	5	37
North Glamorgan	—	—	0	71
North Wales Ambulance	0	0	24	0
Pembrokeshire	11	12	50	—
Pembrokeshire and Derwen	—	—	—	131
Powys Healthcare	0	0	84	0
Rhondda Healthcare	0	0	100	47
South East Wales Ambulance	5	121	23	48
Swansea	58	0	33	837
University Dental Hospital of Wales	—	2	0	2
University Hospital of Wales	—	0	51	38
Velindre Hospital	0	26	0	0
West Wales Ambulance	0	0	0	16
Wrexham Maelor	0	0	38	132
Sub-total	86	414	1,179	2,238
Health Authorities				
Bro Taf	—	—	4,952	3,861
Dyfed Powys	—	—	979	758
Gwent	—	—	31	506
Morgannwg	—	—	408	147
North Wales	—	—	1,268	279
HPAW	—	—	0	0
WHCSA	—	—	0	0
Sub-total	—	—	7,638	5,551
District Health Authorities				
Clwyd	513	624	—	—
Dyfed	250	561	—	—
Gwent	394	196	—	—
Gwynedd	85	454	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	1,497	1,498	—	—
Pembroke	48	—	—	—
Powys	67	27	—	—
South Glamorgan	724	503	—	—
West Glamorgan	1,752	955	—	—
HPAW	48	0	—	—
WHCSA	0	0	—	—
Sub-total	5,378	4,818	—	—
Total	5,464	5,232	8,817	7,789

[1] Pembrokeshire and Derwen HNS trusts merged on 1 April 1997.

Notes:

1. Costs listed include: special payments – compensation under legal obligation: ex-gratia payments – clinical negligence with advice and other clinical negligence and personal injury. The first and third categories may contain cases other than clinical negligence.
2. Figures from health authorities are taken from financial returns and receipts and payments returns.
3. Figures from NHS trusts are taken from financial returns for 1995-96 to 1997-98; figures for 1994-95 are taken from the annual accounts and relate to clinical negligence costs written off in the year.

Source:

Audited annual accounts of NHS trusts, health and district health authorities from 1994-95 to 1997-98.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Health Authorities (Debts)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amount of *(a)* bad debts and *(b)* claims abandoned in Wales for each health authority in each region for the last five years. [76925]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *[holding answer 15 March 1999]*: The information is not centrally available in the format requested. However, the combined costs of bad debts and claims abandoned are shown in the following table.

Total amount of bad debts and claims abandoned

£'000

	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98
NHS Trusts					
Bridgend & District	5	45	22	5	9
Cardiff Community			0	10	2
Carmarthen & District	10	0	3	0	2
Ceredigion & Mid Wales	1	2	0	0	2
Clwydian Community Care	39	37	3	13	4
Derwen	..	6	0	1	..
East Glamorgan	..	15	10	24	21
Glan Clwyd	30	79	21	3	6
Glan Hafren	54	41	44	0	0
Glan Y Mor	..			2	0
Gwent Community	50	37	4	0	1
Gwynedd Community		0	3	20	1
Gwynedd Hospitals		5	5	10	6
Llandough Hospital	50	11	3	3	11
Llanelli Dinefwr	8	3	4	0	8
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance		52	5	0	0
Morriston Hospital		23	5	10	24
Nevill Hall		1	8	3	2
North Glamorgan				6	2
North Wales Ambulance		2	0	0	1
Pembrokeshire	3	0	4	2	
Pembrokeshire & Derwen					1,235
Powys Healthcare	0	0	2	3	0
Rhondda Healthcare		4	1	1	0
South East Wales Ambulance	0	61	0	0	2
Swansea	0	0	6	10	9
University Dental Hospital of Wales			0	0	2
University Hospital of Wales			0	173	126
Velindre Hospital		5	8	0	4
West Wales Ambulance			0	22	1
Wrexham Maelor	23	38	0	0	35
Total	273	467	191	321	1,516
Health Authorities					
Bro Taf				0	0
Dyfed Powys				10	3
Gwent				13	0
Morgannwg				45	72
North Wales				0	70
HPAW				0	0
WHCSA				5,087	52
Total				5,155	197
District Health Authorities					
Clwyd	33	2	0		
Dyfed	8	5	8		
Gwent	15	6	117		
Gwynedd	12	55	31		
Mid Glamorgan	463	12	27		
Pembroke	0	0			
Powys	0	0	2		
South Glamorgan	76	154	0		
West Glamorgan	16	2	79		
HPAW	0	0	452		
WHCSA	0	22	0		
Total	623	258	716		

Notes:

1. Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS trusts merged on 1 April 1997.
2. The loss of £1.235 million relates to repairs to the roof of Withybush hospital shown in the 1997–98 accounts.
3. The loss of £5.087 million relates to remedial works at University Hospital of Wales shown in the 1996–97 accounts.
4. Bad debts and claims abandoned information is collected under one heading in the annual accounts; the figures include claims against private patients, private non-resident patients, overseas visitors, Road Traffic Act claims and other claims.
5. Figures from health authorities are taken from financial returns and receipts and payments returns.
6. Figures from NHS trusts are taken from financial returns for 1994–95 to 1997–98; figures for 1993–94 are taken from the annual accounts and relate to bad debts only.

Source:

Audited Annual Accounts of NHS Trust, health and district health authorities from 1993–94 to 1997–98.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Civil Servants (Appraisal)

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the appraisal performance markings awarded to civil servants in 1998 for *(a)* each agency in his Department and *(b)* the Department broken down by (i) grade, (ii) gender, (iii) ethnicity, (iv) part-time/full-time working and (v) disability; and for (1) each agency and (2) the Department whether the Cabinet Office's four-fifths rule for detecting potential adverse impact was applied to the appraisal markings of civil servants in the 1998 report round. [78145]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is set out in the following tables. Comprehensive information is set out for performance markings by gender but it is not possible to provide the same detail for disability or part-time/full-time because of the small numbers of staff involved. No data on ethnicity can be provided as such data could breach confidentiality as the information would allow the identification of individuals. The top two bands in the Welsh Office and top three in CADW Agency, have been merged because of the small number of officials involved so as to allow for anonymity. We have not applied the Cabinet Office's four-fifths rule in either the Department or the agency because the figures for gender suggest that there is no adverse impact and the numbers involved in the other categories are too small to allow a meaningful assessment.

Welsh Office

Grade bands	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*Number of staff*	*Disability*	*Part time*	*Full time*
Bands F and G (G7 and 6)										
Female	6	23	15	1	0	0	54	1	13	41
Male	22	74	26	4	0	0	134	1	4	130
Total	28	97	41	5	0	0	188	2	17	171
Band E (SEO)										
Female	9	12	5	1	0	0	28	1	4	27
Male	6	58	34	1	0	0	107	1	0	107
Total	15	70	39	2	0	0	135	2	4	131
Band D (HEO and HEO(D))										
Female	15	70	31	5	0	0	130	6	26	104
Male	14	85	47	12	0	0	168	2	1	167
Total	29	155	78	17	0	0	298	8	27	271
Band C (EO)										
Female	34	117	74	33	0	0	281	3	63	218
Male	20	90	65	36	1	0	220	3	1	219
Total	54	207	139	69	1	0	501	6	64	437
Band B (AO)										
Female	31	149	78	28	0	0	332	2	76	256
Male	7	51	48	22	1	0	134	4	3	131
Total	38	200	126	50	1	0	466	6	79	387
Band A (AA)										
Female	40	67	56	21	0	0	258	3	44	214
Male	22	59	36	17	0	0	204	2	0	204
Total	62	126	92	38	0	0	478	5	44	434

CADW

Grade bands	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*Number of staff*	*Disability*	*Part time*	*Full time*
Bands G, F and E (G6 & 7 & SEO)										
Female	0	2	2	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
Male	1	13	2	0	0	0	16	0	0	16
Total	1	15	4	0	0	0	20	0	0	20
Band D (HEO)										
Female	0	3	1	1	0	0	5	0	1	4
Male	1	10	2	0	0	0	13	0	0	13
Total	1	13	3	1	0	0	18	0	1	17
Band C (EO)										
Female	0	7	3	1	0	0	11	1	9	2
Male	1	7	2	1	0	0	11	0	1	10
Total	1	14	5	2	0	0	22	1	10	12

CADW

Grade bands	A	B	C	D	E	F	Number of staff	Disability	Part time	Full time
Band A and B (AA and AO)										
Female	1	9	3	1	0	0	14	0	6	8
Male	4	5	1	2	0	0	13	0	0	13
Total	5	12	4	3	0	0	27	0	6	21
Industrials and Museum										
Female	1	10	5	2	0	0	18	0	5	13
Male	0	2	2	3	0	0	7	1	3	4
Total	1	12	7	5	0	0	25	1	8	17

Note:
The tables exclude casual staff

Investment (Poland)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost to public funds of organising the event on investment in Poland on 10 March in Cardiff. [79061]

Mr. Michael: The main purpose of this event was to raise awareness of export opportunities and the practicalities of doing business in Poland. Direct costs (ie excluding staff costs) amounted to £1,982 and were met by the Department of Trade and Industry.

In future the responsibility of organising events such as this will pass to the National Assembly for Wales.

Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the relationship between the increase of £80 million in expenditure in Wales announced in the Budget and the £852 million indicated as the figure for Wales for the year 1999–2000 in the Treasury's Comprehensive Spending Review on 14 July 1998; and if the £80 million is additional to the latter figure. [79040]

Mr. Michael: In the Comprehensive Spending Review published on 14 July 1998, the following spending plans were announced for the Welsh Office's Departmental Expenditure Limit:

	£ million
1998–99	6,675
1999–2000	7,036
2000–01	7,406
2001–02	7,781

This represented a total cumulative increase of £2.2 billion from the 1998–99 provision. (The figure of £852 million quoted in the question related to the Welsh Office's planned capital expenditure for 1998–99). The £80 million announced in the March Budget is Wales's share of the Capital Modernisation Fund. These resources are additional to the provision set out above.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79616]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The available information is being collected to meet the Environmental Audit Committee's request for information on environmental appraisal as part of its second inquiry into the "Greening Government Initiative".

Green Belt Land

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the green belt land in each local authority area. [79849]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: There are no Green Belts in Wales.

Mental Health Services

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what total NHS expenditure on mental health services in Wales was by health authority in the last year for which figures are available. [80192]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information is not centrally available in the format requested. However, the total expenditure on healthcare provision, both acute and community services, for patients with mental illness is shown in the following table.

	£000
Bro Taf	53,012
Dyfed Powys	31,879
Gwent	28,278
Morgannwg	35,095
North Wales	36,398
Total	184,662

Source:
Annual accounts of health authorities 1997–98

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met representatives of the (i) black and (ii) other ethnic minority communities to discuss mental health treatment. [80195]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: There have been no requests from black or ethnic minority groups for meetings with Ministers to discuss mental health.

I am setting up a Steering Group to establish for the first time, an All Wales Strategy for child and adolescent mental health services and I am considering at present

how best to update our Strategy for adult mental health services. The needs of ethnic minority patients will be addressed in both exercises.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the major advances in treatment which have been implemented in mental health since 1995. [80188]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: It is difficult to define the term "major" in this context. There have been advances in drug treatment and in approaches to treatment since 1995. We work closely with Department of Health, the NHS and other interested parties to ensure that all developments are evaluated and, where appropriate, publicised.

The next major development in disseminating best modern practice will come with the development of the National Service Framework for mental health services, whose standards we expect to introduce in Wales.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Dental Services

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the percentage of dentistry in Wales which is carried out on the NHS. [80193]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: In Wales at the end of September 1998, 60 per cent. of children and 46 per cent. of adults were registered with NHS dentists, having visited them at least once during the preceding 15 months.

NHS net spending on general dental services in Wales in 1997-98 rose to £56.2 million, a 6 per cent. increase over the previous year.

Over the same period, the number of courses of NHS treatment, for adults in Wales, rose by nearly 7 per cent. to 1.446 million.

The number of dentists treating patients under NHS arrangements in Wales reached an all-time high of 960 by the end of 1998.

Data on private dental treatment are not collected by the Welsh Office.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Local Health Groups

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what process of consultation was used in the appointment of people to local health groups in Wales. [79885]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The preliminary guidance on establishing Local Health Groups, issued for consultation in June 1998, elicited over 140 responses. The respondents are listed at Annex B to the final guidance, "Establishing Local Health Groups", which issued in October 1998. In addition, there was wide ranging discussion with stakeholders. The final guidance also sets out the processes to be employed when appointing members to Local Health Groups.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the appointees to the local health groups in Wales. [79886]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Local Health Groups are sub committees of health authorities which have been responsible for their establishment in accordance with Welsh Office guidance "Establishing Local Health Groups" issued in October 1998. Details of membership are held by the individual authority.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has undertaken concerning the level of the uniform business rate charged on Wales in respect of its impact on small shops in town centres; and if he will make a statement. [80213]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The White Paper "Local Voices, Modernising Local Government in Wales" (Cm 4028) said that when the Government introduce local rates they will consider introducing measures to reduce the rating burden on small businesses. Discussions on implementing these proposals are already underway with a range of business representatives, including the Federation of Small Businesses Wales.

Following the transfer of functions this will be a matter for the National Assembly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Relations

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent on *(a)* publicity, *(b)* advertising and *(c)* press relations in each month of 1998, broken down by department. [73892]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Information Services spend on publicity and advertising for 1998 was as follows:

	£
January-March	nil
April	132.89
May	30,037.15
June	5,566.41
July	34,936.90
August	12,441.87
September	57,405.47
October	25,997.31
November	109,706.90
December	15,238.78
Total	291,463.78

Departmental Staff (Ethnic Origin)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will provide a breakdown, in numerical and

percentage terms, of the ethnic origin, at 1 March, of *(a)* her private office, *(b)* Government special advisers, *(c)* her Policy Unit and *(d)* staff in total. [78503]

Marjorie Mowlam: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Under the terms of the Civil Service Ethnic Monitoring Code of Practice it would be inappropriate to provide the information in the form requested because of the very small numbers involved.

(b) I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 39.

(c) I do not have a policy unit.

(d) My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office will provide this information centrally.

Proscribed Organisations

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been arrested for membership of proscribed organisations since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement; how many were arrested for this offence in each year since 1969; and if she will make a statement. [78912]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 26 March 1999]*. We do not have figures on arrests. We do, however, have figures for the number charged with membership of a proscribed organisation as a primary offence. These figures do not include cases of people charged with membership alongside more serious offences. The figures go back only to 1990.

Year	*Total number of persons charged with membership of a proscribed organisation as a primary offence*
1990	7
1991	6
1992	6
1993	14
1994	12
1995	5
1996	10
1997	1
1998	6
10 April 1998–23 March 1999	4

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list all those task forces and policy reviews with external members established by her Department since May 1997 which have set up *(a)* sub-groups, *(b)* working parties and *(c)* other subsidiary committees. [79254]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

Task force/Policy review	*(a) Sub-groups*	*(b) Working parties*	*(c) Other subsidiary committees*
Task forces			
Working Group to plan for a single NI Equality Commission	Yes	—	—
New Deal in NI Task Force	Yes	—	—
Policy review groups			
Economic Development Strategy Review	—	Yes	Yes
Youth Service Policy Review Group	—	Yes	—

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for all task forces and policy reviews with external members established by her Department since May 1997 *(a)* their dates of establishment, *(b)* those which have issued final reports and their dates of publication, *(c)* those which have been terminated and their dates of termination and *(d)* for those bodies still in existence, expected reporting and termination dates. [79277]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

	(a)	*(b)*	*(c)*	*(d) For those still in existence*	
Task force/Policy review	*Date of establishment*	*Date of publication of final report*	*Date of termination*	*Expected date of final report*	*Expected termination date*
Task forces					
Working Group to plan for a single NI Equality Commission	November 1998	Anticipated mid April 1999	Final meeting 26 March 1999		
New Deal in NI Task Force	September 1997			Not known	Not known
NI Skills Task Force	February 1999			Not known	Not known
Policy review groups					
Northern Ireland Drugs Strategy Review	27 May 1997			Spring/Summer 1999	Spring/Summer 1999
Criminal Injuries Compensation Review	30 September 1998			June 1999	June 1999

Task force/Policy review	(a) Date of establishment	(b) Date of publication of final report	(c) Date of termination	(d) For those still in existence: Expected date of final report	Expected termination date
Review of Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland	27 June 1998			Autumn 1999	Autumn 1999
Independent Commission on Policing	3 June 1998			Summer 1999	Summer 1999
Fundamental Review of the Economic Development Strategy in NI	January 1998	22 March 1999			End April 1999
Youth Service Policy Review Group	June 1997			April 1999	April 1999

Winter Mortality Rates

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaths where hypothermia was mentioned on the death certificate as the main or contributory cause of death took place in Northern Ireland in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1987, *(d)* 1982 and *(e)* 1977 amongst those (i) of all ages, (ii) aged 60 to 74, (iii) aged 74 to 84 and (iv) aged over 85 years; what were the winter mortality rates for (1) the population as a whole, (2) people aged 60 to 74, (3) people aged 75 to 84 and (4) people aged 85 years and over; and what the percentage increase was in each group compared to non-winter deaths in (A) 1997–98, (B) 1992–93, (C) 1987–88, (D) 1982–83 and (E) 1977–78. [179420]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Statistics and Research Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. Edgar Jardine. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. F. Jardine to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 2 April 1999:

You tabled a parliamentary question asking the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—

(1) how many deaths where hypothermia was mentioned on the death certificate as the main or contributory cause of death took place in Northern Ireland in (a) 1997, (b) 1992, (c) 1987, (d) 1982 and (e) 1977 amongst those (i) of all ages, (ii) aged 60 to 74, (iii) aged 74 to 84 and (iv) aged over 85 years; and

(2) what were the winter mortality rates for (a) the population as a whole, (b) people aged 60 to 74, (c) people aged 75 to 84 and (d) people aged over 85 years; and what the percentage increase was in each age group compared to non-winter deaths in (i) 1997/98, (ii) 1992/93, (iii) 1987/88, (iv) 1982/83 and (v) 1977/78, respectively.

Deaths are classified by the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) codes.

In answer to part (1) of your question Table 1 shows the number of deaths occurring in Northern Ireland, in each of the years specified, where hypothermia (ICD code 991.6) was either the main cause or a contributory cause of death. In 1977, there were no deaths attributed to hypothermia, but as the table shows, 14 deaths were attributed to ICD code 991 which covers all deaths due to the effects of reduced temperature. Consequently the detailed information requested on hypothermia has been produced for deaths due to the effects of reduced temperature, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Death due to the effects of reduced temperature by ICD code

Deaths due to the effects of reduced temperature	1977	1982	1987	1992	1997
ICD code 991.6—hypothermia	0	17	15	14	22
ICD code 991.9—unspecified	0	0	4	0	0
ICD code 991—sub-code not specified (excluding 991.6 and 991.9)	14	0	0	0	2
ICD code 991—all deaths due to the effects of reduced temperature	14	17	19	14	24

In response to part (2) of your question Table 3 shows the winter and non-winter mortality rates as requested and the percentage increase from non-winter to winter mortality rates in each of the categories.

I trust this information is sufficient, however if I can be of further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Table 2: Deaths due to the effects of reduced temperature

Number of deaths

Deaths by age	1977	1982	1987	1992	1997
Main cause					
0 to 59 years	13	2	1	3	4
60 to 74 years	1	6	1	1	3
75 to 84 years	0	5	1	3	3
85 or more years	0	4	0	1	1
All ages	14	17	3	8	11

Table 2: Deaths due to the effects of reduced temperature[1]

Number of deaths

Deaths by age	1977	1982	1987	1992	1997
Contributory cause					
0 to 59 years	0	0	6	0	8
60 to 74 years	0	0	3	2	2
75 to 84 years	0	0	4	4	2
85 or more years	0	0	3	0	1
All ages	0	0	16	6	13
All causes					
0 to 59 years	13	2	7	3	12
60 to 74 years	1	6	4	3	5
75 to 84 years	0	5	5	7	5
85 or more years	0	4	3	1	2
All ages	14	17	19	14	24

[1] Deaths shown have been coded as ICD code 991—Deaths due to effects of reduced temperature

Table 3: A comparison of winter and non-winter mortality rates (all causes)

Rates per 1,000 population

Mortality rates	Year 1977–78	1982–83	1987–88	1992–93	1997–98
Winter mortality					
0 to 59 years	2.9	2.4	2.0	1.6	1.5
60 to 74 years	36.2	34.4	31.6	25.9	22.8
75 to 84 years	104.8	102.0	91.1	77.6	74.9
85 or more years	252.5	246.8	233.9	189.0	208.4
All ages	12.2	12.0	11.2	9.7	9.7
Non winter mortality					
0 to 59 years	2.6	2.1	2.0	1.6	1.5
60 to 74 years	29.3	29.0	26.6	25.1	20.7
75 to 84 years	85.8	80.8	74.6	73.2	65.3
85 or more years	195.5	172.9	192.6	182.2	178.3
All ages	10.1	9.7	9.6	9.4	8.7
Percentage increase from non winter to winter rates					
0 to 59 years	11	14	2	–0	–1
60 to 74 years	24	19	19	3	10
75 to 84 years	22	26	22	6	15
85 or more years	29	43	21	4	17
All ages	21	24	17	4	12

[1] Year incorporates December of year 1 and January to November of year 2. For example, 1997–98 incorporates December of 1997 and January to November of 1998.

[2] Winter months assumed to be December—March.

[3] 1998 deaths figures are provisional.

[4] 1998 population projection used as denominator for rate calculation as 1998 mid-year population estimate will not be available until June of 1999.

[5] The rounded percentages shown have been calculated using unrounded rates.

Eurozone

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the impact of the eurozone on inward investment to Northern Ireland. [79400]

Mr. Ingram: The lead-time associated with securing inward investment is usually quite lengthy; therefore, it is too early to assess the impact that the introduction of the euro has had on investment.

The Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland will continue to monitor the flows of inward investment to try to assess the impact, if any, of the introduction of the euro.

Peace Process

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the role of community groups in facilitating the peace process. [79399]

Mr. McFall: The Good Friday Agreement recognises and values the work done by voluntary organisations to develop reconciliation and mutual understanding between and within communities. This work has a vital role in consolidating peace and political agreement. Furthermore, the District Partnerships, established with significant community sector participation as a delivery mechanism for the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, have harnessed the talents and energies of local people to achieve common goals. This has helped to underpin the peace process at local level.

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if she will list for the week ended 27 March the number of (1) punishment beatings and (2) punishment shootings which took place in Northern Ireland indicating how many in each category were committed by *(a)* Loyalist and *(b)* Republican groups; [79709]

(2) if she will list for the week ended 27 March the number of violent incidents involving paramilitary groups which took place in Northern Ireland, indicating how many involved (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups. [79708]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of security incidents during the period 21 March-27 March 1999 are as shown:

Shooting incidents: 3

Bombing incidents: 3

The numbers of casualties as a result of paramilitary-style attacks during the period are as follows:

	Loyalist	Republican
Assaults	6	nil
Shootings	nil	1
Total	6	1

Notes:

1. Figures may be subject to minor amendment.
2. The shooting and bombing incidents cannot as yet be firmly attributed to a grouping.

Green Belts

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the green belt land in each local authority area. [79842]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 13 April 1999:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Question about a list of green belt land in Northern Ireland.

The Planning Service, an Agency within the Department of the Environment, is the sole planning authority in Northern Ireland. The Department's policy on green belts is set out in Policy GB/CPA 1 of the publication entitled "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland", a copy of which is available in the Library. There is no separate list of green belt land in Northern Ireland, as green belts around cities, towns and villages are designated by reference to the maps that accompany the Department's Development Plans covering district council areas.

If, however, the Hon Member would find it helpful, further details can be provided on green belt land at specific locations.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* she, *(b)* her officials, *(c)* her advisers and *(d)* her PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79644]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*. The requirements of the Ministerial Code also apply to Parliamentary Private Secretaries when attending any meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

CABINET OFFICE

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79628]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) today, *Official Report*, column *66*.

Modernising Government

Sir George Young: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which of the public services to which he referred in his oral statement on 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 859–61, it is planned to have delivered 24 hours a day, and seven days a week, where there is a demand. [80079]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Modernising Government White Paper, launched on 30 March, includes a commitment to ensure that public services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, where there is demand. This will be achieved mainly through the use of information technology and call centres. To help bring about this fundamental change in delivering government services, we have proposed that 100% of basic dealings with government should be capable of being carried out electronically by the year 2008.

Some specific targets relating to 24 hours a day, seven days a week services mentioned in the White Paper are:

By the end of 2000 everyone will be able to phone NHS Direct at any time for healthcare advice;

By 2001, job-seekers should be able to look and apply for jobs through the Employment Service using the internet;

By 2002 it will be possible for the public electronically to book driving tests; file tax returns; get information about benefits; get on-line health information and advice; use the National Grid for Learning; apply for training loans and student support.

In addition, by 2002 businesses will be able electronically to complete VAT registration and make VAT returns; file returns at Companies House; apply for regional support grants; and receive payments from government for the supply of goods and services.

Melissa Virus

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many Government departments have been infected by the Melissa virus; and if he will make a statement. [80225]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Each Government department is responsible for its own security, but departments are encouraged to report all IT security incidents, including virus infections, to the Unified Incident Reporting and Alert Scheme (UNIRAS), co-ordinated by the Security Service. UNIRAS issued a warning to Government departments about the Melissa virus on 29 March, giving advice on appropriate countermeasures. No department has so far reported any infection by Melissa, but the UNIRAS team anticipate that there might be a number of incidents, about which they would expect to receive routine reports in due course.

KPMG

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what has been the total cost of services supplied to the Government by KPMG since 1 May 1997. [80399]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This information for the cost of services supplied by KPMG to the whole Government is not held centrally.

For information relating to the cost of services provided by KPMG to the Cabinet Office, its Agencies and NDPBs, I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *336–37*, to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmonds (Mr. Ruffley). Since then, there has been further expenditure of £31,999.95 (inc. VAT).

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will

assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80419]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Treaty of Amsterdam is not expected to have an impact on Cabinet Office staffing. The EU Institutions have to take account of the requirements of the "Protocol on Subsidiarity and Proportionality" and the "Declaration on the Quality of Drafting of Community Legislation", which fall under the responsibilities of the Cabinet Office.

It was agreed at the Vienna European Council in December 1998 that the Protocol would come into force immediately, without waiting for the ratification of the Treaty. An Inter-Institutional Agreement putting the Declaration into effect was finalised in December 1998.

One-stop Shops

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he is taking to co-locate local and central Government services in one-stop shops; and if he will list the places where this has been done successfully in the north-west. [80223]

Mr. Kilfoyle: A key aim of the Modernising Government White Paper, launched on 30 March, is to deliver public services that meet the needs of citizens. The White Paper contained a number of initiatives to encourage joint working between central and local government, including through one-stop shops, for example: a big push on eliminating obstacles to joined-up working; a more co-ordinated approach to property management; 'learning labs' to encourage new ways of front-line working by suspending rules that stifle innovation; and changing our approach to, and guidance on, reviewing agencies and NDPBs to include a focus on the scope for improving services through collaboration. A second round of the Invest to Save Budget will fund new projects that involve partnership working. One of the projects receiving funds from the first round is a pilot project called INFOSHOP involving the Cabinet Office working with 16 local authorities, including the Metropolitan Borough of Knowsley. This is developing a computer information system that local authority staff can use to answer complex customer queries.

There are numerous examples of good practice from one-stop shops across the country, many of which are led by local government. The Government do not keep a central record of one-stop shops, so it is not possible to list those that operate in the north-west.

Centre for Management and Policy Studies

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when the Government first indicated its intention to set up the Centre for Management and Policy Studies. [80228]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government first indicated their intention to set up the Centre for Management and Policy Studies on 28 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *132–34*. The announcement was made by the Prime Minister, in a written answer to a question on the future of the Cabinet Office, following the review of the Cabinet Office by Sir Richard Wilson.

European Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 when his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee unofficial texts of draft European legislation; [80541]

(2) on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee council working documents. [80548]

Mr. Kilfoyle: My Department receives a large volume of both official and unofficial/working texts during the course of European Union negotiations on EU legislation and other matters. In order to facilitate the work of the European Scrutiny Committee and to keep it informed of the progress of negotiations, my Department submits Explanatory Memoranda (EMs) to the Committee. Since 1 May 1997, my Department has submitted 9 EMs to the European Scrutiny Committee. On one occasion, a Council working document covering draft joint guidelines on the quality of the drafting of Community legislation was attached to an EM submitted on 10 July 1998.

European Legislation

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will place in the Library a copy of the rules which provide that working documents of the European Union in relation to draft legislation are the subject of confidentiality and cannot be disclosed for parliamentary scrutiny in member states. [80500]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Council works on the basis of proposals for legislation adopted by the Commission and published in the Official Journal of the European Communities. Article 5 of Council Decision 93/662/EC of 6 December 1993 setting out the Rules of Procedure of the Council notes that

"deliberations of the Council shall be covered by the obligation of professional secrecy".

This rule is held to apply not only to meetings of the Council itself, but also to preparatory meetings, eg COREPER, and Working Groups. The rules on public access to Council documents are set out in Council Decision 93/731/EC of 20 December 1993 and the Council's Code of Conduct on Public Access (93/730/EC). I have today placed copies of these documents in the Library of the House. The Government are committed to the principle of effective parliamentary scrutiny of European legislation, but decisions on the disclosure of particular documents to facilitate this process are for the individual Departments concerned.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Appeal Committee Chairmen

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeal committee chairmen are *(a)* women, *(b)* from ethnic minorities, *(c)* solicitors or former solicitors and *(d)* barristers or former barristers; what is the total number of chairmen; and if he will make a statement. [79803]

Angela Eagle: There are currently 686 full and part-time chairmen of tribunals working for the Independent Tribunal Service; 209 are women.

The Independent Tribunal Service monitors ethnicity on a regular basis. Chairmen are not compelled to provide information on their ethnic origins and, therefore, full and detailed records are not available. However, available records show that 28 chairmen are from ethnic minorities.

All chairmen are required to hold legal qualifications. Information is not available to indicate the split between solicitors and barristers (and advocates in Scotland). This information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

All chairmen are appointed by my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor in consultation with the Lord Advocate. Appointments are made on merit in accordance with the Lord Chancellor's Department's equal opportunities policies.

Fraud

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals in the Fraud Strategy Directorate had less than *(a)* one, *(b)* two, *(c)* five and *(d)* 10 years' direct experience of counter-fraud work before their appointment to the Directorate. [80390]

Mr. Timms: To develop, implement, audit and evaluate the Government's anti-fraud strategy, the Fraud Strategy Directorate requires people with a variety of skills and experience including knowledge of policy development, Social Security administration, legislation and programme and budget management. Most staff in the Directorate have previously had at least several years experience working in the administration of Social Security and dealing with customers, where countering fraud is the concern of all staff.

Thirteen of the 48 staff in the Directorate have had prior experience of working in the field specifically on counter fraud work and their years of experience of this are as follows:

Up to 1 year: 1 person
1 to 5 years: 2 people
2 to 5 years: 6 people
5 to 10 years: 3 people
More than 10 years: 1 person.

SERPS

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will review the changes brought about by the Social Security Act 1986 to the state earnings-related pension scheme which will take effect on 6 April 2000; [79899]

(2) if he will make a statement on the advice given by his Department on the legislative changes brought about by the Social Security Act 1986 to the state earnings-related pension scheme. [79943]

Mr. Timms: The Social Security Act 1986 modified SERPS for those reaching pension age from 6 April 1999 and 6 April 2000 onwards in several key areas. Most of these changes were incorporated into subsequent amendments to the leaflets NP46, "A guide to Retirement Pensions", and NP45, "A guide to Widow's Benefit". However, the change affecting the rate of SERPS which can be inherited by a surviving spouse was not included until 1996.

We are aware of cases where information has been given in response to inquiries by members of the public that did not reflect the change to inherited SERPS. The Benefits Agency has recently issued instructions to all staff to ensure that this does not recur.

We hope to resolve the matter as soon as we can.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 26 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *440*, on SERPS, for how long records of inquiries about SERPS entitlement are retained before destruction. [79658]

Mr. Timms: It is a requirement that written inquiries to the Benefits Agency (BA) Retirement Pension Forecast Advice Unit are retained for a minimum of 20 weeks. Approximately 2 years ago, the Unit began to retain a record of the inquiry and the answer given on computer for 18 months.

Written inquiries to BA Local Offices are retained for a minimum of 20 weeks.

Telephone inquiries of a general nature are not recorded. Normally, if specific information is given in a telephone call that affects a benefit claim then this is recorded. It is retained for the same period as written inquiries.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to set up pilot projects in respect of the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit; and if he will make a statement. [80660]

Mr. Timms: As part of the Government's programme of work to modernise the administration of Social Security and to help reduce fraud and error, there are a number of pilots in progress. New ones are likely to be developed in the future. Pilots that have recently been established or are due to start soon include those outlined.

From 12 April 1999 in 7 local authorities, we are testing the requirement of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) claimants to provide sufficient information for a National Insurance number to be traced and confirmed, or be allocated. Testing will continue until the requirement is extended to all authorities from September 1999.

Between July 1999 and September 1999, the Benefits Agency and local authorities will be piloting the incorporation of HB paid to claimants who are in receipt of Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based) into the Benefits Agency's Area Benefit Review programme which measures the level of fraud and error.

Since 23 November 1998, the Department has been running a prosecution pilot, where selected local authorities can use Departmental solicitors free of charge to prosecute their cases of benefit fraud. The pilot is scheduled to run for a period of one year.

Pensions

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the pension savings which will be needed to purchase an annuity equivalent to the difference between the value of the minimum income guarantee and passported benefits, and the value of the basic pension, in 15 years' time, assuming that the basic pension is raised in line with prices, the minimum income guarantee is raised in line with earnings, and that yields on Government bonds remain the same as at present. [79785]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

Projections of the levels of council tax, local authority and private sector rents in 15 years' time are not available. It is therefore not possible to estimate likely values of Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit so far into the future. However, these benefits are still available (at the differing rates) to people above the Minimum Income Guarantee. Free prescriptions are available to all pensioners, not just to those on Income Support.

In 15 years' time, in order to purchase an annuity to provide an income equivalent to the difference between the basic State pension and the Minimum Income Guarantee would require a lump sum of approximately £15,000 in 1999 earnings terms, or £19,000 in 1999 prices.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £1,000.
2. Earnings grow 1.5 per cent. faster than prices.
3. Annuity rates remain at the March 1999 level and are for a single man aged 65.
4. Basic State pension rises in line with prices.
5. Minimum Income Guarantee rises in line with earnings.

Widows

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will make an announcement concerning compensation for widows who were misadvised by his Department on the halving of entitlement to their husband's additional pension after 5 April 2000. [80659]

Mr. Timms: We are making further inquiries and will make an announcement in due course.

Lone Parents

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *706*, on lone parents, how many lone parents receive income support *(a)* broken down by local authority area and *(b)* broken down by constituency. [79813]

Angela Eagle: The information has been placed in the library.

Widowed Parents Allowance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* widowers and *(b)* widows he expects to be entitled to both widowed parents allowance and income support in (i) the first full year of implementation and (ii) 2020. [80654]

Angela Eagle: There are estimated to be around 5,000 widows and 5,000 widowers expected to be entitled to both Widowed Parent's Allowance and Income Support in (i) the first full year of implementation and in (ii) 2020.

Notes:

1. The estimates presented above are broad orders of magnitude. They are rounded to the nearest 5,000 and are subject to a wide range of uncertainty.
2. Estimates assume a constant proportion of cases are entitled to Widowed Parent's Allowance and Income Support.
3. Estimates use information from the 1995–6 Family Resources Survey, the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Inquiry and forecasts from the Government Actuary's Department concerning the number of men and women affected by the proposed changes.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated cost of *(a)* the proposed £10 disregard of widowed parents allowance in calculating entitlement to income related benefits and *(b)* the proposed premium for widows and widowers aged over 55 years in income related benefits in the first full year of implementation. [80657]

Angela Eagle: The estimated cost of introducing the proposed £10 disregard of widowed parents allowance in calculating entitlement to income related benefits is £10 million in the first full year of implementation.

The estimated cost of introducing the proposed premium for widows and widowers aged over 55 years in income related benefits is £10 million in the first full year of implementation.

Notes:

1. The estimates presented above are broad orders of magnitude. They are rounded to the nearest £10 million and are subject to a wide range of uncertainty.
2. Means-tested benefit offsets were estimated using the 1995–6 Family Resources survey and the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Inquiries.
3. Estimates are based on forecasts from the Government Actuary's Department concerning the number of men and women affected by the proposed changes.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80409]

Angela Eagle: The Treaty of Amsterdam will have minimal impact on the responsibilities of the Department and no additional staff are planned. Although Article 137 of the consolidated Treaty introduces an additional Community power to legislate in Social Security, we already have extensive experience of Community Social Security legislation under Article 42. The latter legislation will, in future, be subject to co-decision with the European Parliament.

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate inspections which have been initiated since the establishment of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, giving the dates *(a)* that they were commissioned, *(b)* the inspections started, *(c)* they were completed and *(d)* he received the completed reports. [80389]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the table.

Details of BFI inspections of local authorities and agencies

Local authority	*Date inspection announced*	*Date inspection started (questionnaire issued)*	*Date on-site visit completed*	*Date Secretary of State received report*
Blackpool	17 September 1997	6 October 1997	5 December 1997	1 April 1998
Teesdale	12 December 1997	9 January 1998	17 April 1998	6 August 1998
Ipswich	12 December 1997	30 January 1998	8 May 1998	16 December 1998
Leicester	12 December 1997	6 March 1998	5 June 1998	16 December 1998
Eastbourne	12 December 1997	13 March 1998	12 June 1998	12 February 1999
Inverclyde	12 December 1997	29 May 1998	28 August 1998	12 February 1999
Broxbourne	12 December 1997	9 January 1998	17 April 1998	5 March 1999
East Dumbartonshire	12 December 1997	13 February 1998	15 May 1998	18 March 1999
Croydon	12 December 1997	20 March 1998	19 June 1998	30 March 1999
East Lothian	12 December 1997	12 June 1998	11 September 1998	18 March 1999
South Ayrshire	29 May 1998	31 July 1998	30 October 1998	18 March 1999
Elmbridge	29 May 1998	3 July 1998	2 October 1998	25 March 1999
Oldham	29 May 1998	10 July 1998	9 October 1998	25 March 1999
Thanet	29 May 1998	10 July 1998	9 October 1998	25 March 1999
Tower Hamlets	29 May 1998	17 July 1998	16 October 1998	—
The Wrekin	29 May 1998	14 August 1998	13 November 1998	—
Trafford	29 May 1998	14 August 1998	13 November 1998	—
Gateshead	29 May 1998	18 September 1998	18 December 1998	—
East Devon	29 May 1998	25 September 1998	8 January 1999	—
Stoke on Trent	29 May 1998	25 September 1998	8 January 1999	—
Kirklees	29 May 1998	25 September 1998	8 January 1999	—
City of Dundee	11 November 1998	27 November 1998	26 February 1999	—
Richmond upon Thames	11 November 1998	4 December 1998	5 March 1999	—
Swansea	11 November 1998	11 December 1998	12 March 1999	—
Oxford	11 November 1998	18 December 1998	19 March 1999	—
Bournemouth	11 November 1998	25 December 1998	26 March 1999	—
Lichfield	11 November 1998	8 January 1999	9 April 1999	—
Sandwell	11 November 1998	8 January 1999	9 April 1999	—
West Wiltshire	11 November 1998	15 January 1999	—	—
Powys	11 November 1998	22 January 1999	—	—
Wigan	11 November 1998	5 February 1999	—	—
Shrewsbury and Atcham	11 November 1998	5 February 1999	—	—
Norwich	11 November 1998	19 February 1999	—	—
City of York	11 November 1998	26 February 1999	—	—
Carlisle	11 November 1998	26 February 1999	—	—
Rotherham	11 November 1998	12 May 1999	—	—
Ellesmere Port	11 November 1998	26 March 1999	—	—
St. Helens	11 November 1998	2 April 1999	—	—
South Lakeland	11 November 1998	2 April 1999	—	—
Babergh	11 November 1998	9 April 1999	—	—

Agency	*Date announced*	*Date inspection started*	*Date on-site visit completed*	*Date Secretary of State Received Report*
BA	April 98	April 1998	August 1998	March 1999
CSA	November 1998	October 1998	October 1998	—
CA	November 1998	October 1998	February 1999	—

Benefit Payments (Post Offices)

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers of 25 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *434–35*, and 25 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *388*, on the payment card trial, what factors underlie the discrepancy between the figure of £17 million for estimated total savings and the figure of £68,000 for savings already received. [79657]

Angela Eagle: The figure of £68,000 given in my Written Answer on 25 February represented fraud savings attributable to the Payment Card up to December 1998. The figure of £17 million given on 25 March is an estimate, based on the latest agreed plans, of total fraud savings from the Payment Card during the pilot period, including savings from the trial of multiple benefit card payment.

Bereavement Premium

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants he expects to be entitled to the premium in income-related benefits for widowed people over the age of 55 years in (i) the first full year of implementation and (ii) 2020. [80653]

Angela Eagle: It is estimated that around 5,000 widowed people will be entitled to the Bereavement Premium in Income Support in the first full year of implementation.

The Bereavement Premium will be available only to those men and women aged 55 or over at the start of the proposed new scheme of bereavement benefits who are widowed during the subsequent five years. It will not be available in 2020.

Notes:

1. The estimates presented above are broad orders of magnitude. They are rounded to the nearest 5,000 and are subject to a wide range of uncertainty.

2. Estimates use information from the 1995/96 Family Resources Survey, the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry and forecasts from the Government Actuary's Department concerning the number of men and women affected by the proposed changes.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide data on the earnings levels of *(a)* all pensioners, *(b)* newly retired pensioners and *(c)* pensioners aged 75 years or over, in a format consistent with Tables VI and VII of the Pensioner Incomes Series, based on the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey. [80424]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the table.

Proportion of pensioners with earnings and the average amount of earnings

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Proportion with income from earnings (percentage)			
All pensioner units	8	8	8
Newly retired pensioner units	20	20	20
Pensioner units aged 75 years or over	2	2	2
Average earnings (£ per week) of those in receipt			
Mean amounts			
All pensioner units	190	177	198
Newly retired pensioner units	206	188	209
Pensioner units aged 75 years or over	178	150	156
Median amounts			
All pensioner units	113	100	112
Newly retired pensioner units	140	117	139
Pensioner units aged 75 years or over	99	76	58

Notes:

1. All money amounts are given in £ per week at July 1996 prices.

2. Earnings are defined as earned income from either employment or self employment.

3. "Pensioner units" are defined as single people over state pension age (60 and over for women, 65 and over for men) and couples (married or cohabiting) where the man is aged over State pension age.

4. 'Newly retired pensioner units' are defined as those less than five years older than State pension age: ie single women aged 60–64, single men aged 65–69, and couples in which the man is aged 65–69.

5. 'Pensioner units aged 75 years or over' are defined as single people aged 75 or over, and couples in which the man is aged 75 or over.

6. All figures, and particularly those for pensioner units aged 75 or over, should be treated with caution since they are based on small sample sizes.

Source:

Family Resources Survey

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the income sources which his Department has included in the category of investment income for the purpose of the Pensioner Incomes Series; and if he will provide a breakdown of the contribution of each to total investment income of *(a)* newly retired pensioners, *(b)* all pensioners aged under 75 years, including newly retired pensioners and *(c)* all pensioners aged 75 years or above. [80423]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

The Pensioners' Incomes Series 1996–97 is based mainly on data from the Family Expenditure Survey (FES). The following sources of income collected in the FES are included in the investment income category:

Interest on money held in accounts:
- Bank accounts
- Building Society accounts
- National Savings Bank ordinary accounts
- National Savings Bank investment accounts
- Tax Exempt Special Savings Accounts
- Other savings or deposit accounts.

Income from stocks and shares, unit trusts, gilts, Personal Equity Plans.

British savings bonds interest.

Income from annuities, trusts covenants personal pensions.

Property income.

Other unearned income from royalties, sleeping partnerships, overseas pensions.

The Pensioners' Incomes Series also includes tables based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS), which uses slightly different questions. Therefore, while the total investment income category is comparable between the two surveys, the individual sources listed may be grouped in different ways.

It is not possible to estimate the contribution of each individual source to the total investment income estimates provided in The Pensioners' Incomes Series. This is because estimates relating to those pensioners with very high incomes are based on data from the Survey of Personal Incomes of the Board of the Inland Revenue. This survey does not provide a detailed breakdown of individual sources of investment income.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the pensioner incomes coming from the state in 2050, as predicted in the Green Paper, Partnership in Pensions, will be delivered via means-tested benefits. [80391]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available.

Projections forward to the year 2050 are subject to a high degree of uncertainty given the number of assumptions that need to be made in making these estimates. Some of those who will be pensioners in 2050 have yet to begin work, and most are today in their 20s and 30s.

Estimates of the numbers of pensioners receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee have been made by extrapolating estimates from the PENSIM model, but these can give only a broad indication of the likely order of magnitude of figures so far into the future. The

PENSIM projections can be applied only to estimates of the proportion of pensioners on the Minimum Income Guarantee. Breakdowns of individual pensioner incomes into components including State pension payments and other income related benefits (such as Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit) are not available as these projections would require many more assumptions to be made and would be surrounded by an unacceptable level of uncertainty.

Pension Reform

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the feasibility of a faster implementation of his proposals for pension reform. [79865]

Mr. Timms: The Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill provides a framework for stakeholder pension schemes which should enable people to join the new schemes from April 2001. The Government propose to introduce the new State Second Pension from April 2002.

We do not consider it practicable to implement our proposals any more quickly, given the extensive changes to operational systems that will be required following passage of the necessary legislation. These impact not only on Government but also on employers and the pensions industry.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 623, on social security committee reports, for what reason he is unable to indicate on what occasions Ministers have discussed with hon. Members the contents of *(a)* draft reports, *(b)* reports prior to their issue and *(c)* embargoed copies of reports. [80002]

Mr. Darling: It would neither be practical nor serve any useful purpose to record every conversation between Ministers and hon. Members which might or might not touch on matters covered by subsequent Select Committee reports.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people in Eltham have had a change in their Disability Living Allowance entitlement in the last year; how many have resulted in *(a)* a reduction, *(b)* withdrawal and *(c)* no change, and how many have gone to appeal; [80497]

(2) what is the average cost of an appeal against changes in Disability Living Allowance entitlement for 1998-99, and if he will make a statement; [80496]

(3) how many people in Eltham have completed an appeal against an alteration in their Disability Living Allowance in 1998-99; and how many have resulted in *(a)* reinstatement, *(b)* complete withdrawal, *(c)* an increase, *(d)* no change and *(e)* a reduction in each component. [80498]

Mr. Bayley: The information on Disability Living Allowance claims and appeals is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

2,640 people were receiving Disability Living Allowance in the Eltham Constituency on 30 November 1998.

For the 12 months ending 30 November 1998, 80 people in the Eltham Constituency had their award of Disability Living Allowance increased, 80 people had their entitlement decreased and 180 people had their award terminated.

The average cost of a Disability Living Allowance appeal for 1998-99 is not currently available, but is estimated to be £300 per appeal.

There are no data for the number of applicants in the Eltham Constituency who have had a change in entitlement during 1998 and who have then asked for a review or submitted an appeal.

Note:

The reason an award is terminated is not available. An award can be terminated because of death, residence or presence conditions no longer satisfied, relinquishment of benefit by claimant, or withdrawal of benefit by the Department.

Source:

Analytical Services Division. As the figures are below 500 the numbers are too small to be statistically reliable.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disabled people up to the age of 21 years are currently receiving state benefits due to their disability. [80027]

Mr. Bayley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Number of recipients under 21 years of age for each of the relevant benefits

Type of benefit	*Recipients under the age of 21*
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit	762
War Disablement Pension	80
Disability Living Allowance	255,600
Incapacity Benefit	300
Severe Disablement Allowance	26,780
Income Support Disability Premiums	
Severe Disability Premium (Higher rate)	Negligible
Severe Disability Premium (Lower rate)	1,000
Disability Premium	4,000
Disabled Child Premium	34,000
Disability Working Allowance	958

Number of pensions in payment. Claimants may be in receipt of more than one pension. Based on 10 per cent. sample at 5 April 1997, and include an allowance for late returns.

Based on a 5 per cent. sample at 31 August 1998.

Based on 5 per cent. data at 30 November 1998.

Taken from a 5 per cent. sample at 30 November 1998 of the benefit computer system, excluding a small number of cases held clerically.

Based on a 5 per cent. sample from the Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, November 1998, and rounded to the nearest thousand. Claimants may receive more than one type of disability premium and may therefore be counted in more than one total.

Based on 100 per cent. count of Disability Working Allowance claims at October 1998.

Notes:

1. Many people will be receiving more than one benefit.

2. [illegible] Number is too small to be statistically reliable.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the total number of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76831]

Mr. Blunkett: There have been no occasions since 2 May 1997 when special advisers in this department have travelled abroad in an official capacity unaccompanied by Ministers. Costs are counted within the total of any overseas trips by Ministers.

New Deal Helplines

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the cost of running helplines for the New Deal; how many staff have been employed in manning the helplines; and how many calls have been received since their inception. [77808]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 19 March 1999]:* The total cost of providing the New Deal Information Line up to the end of February 1999 is £609,297.31. This has included significant numbers of calls for detailed and extensive information which result in long and complex calls.

It has recorded 42,133 responses since it opened in October 1997. Seventy six per cent. of these responses have been from organisations requesting information or wanting to be involved in New Deal. The latter are diverted to the appropriate Employment Service regional office.

The management and provision of the line is handled by a specialist outside company. The number of staff employed by them and dedicated to answering New Deal calls is currently four, but there is also a pool of 50 to 60 operators trained to take New Deal calls during peak periods.

New Deal (Gateway)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the range of bids accepted by his Department to deliver the Gateway and each of the four strands of the New Deal. [77684]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 19 March 1999]:* Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Phil Willis, dated 13 April 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about the range of bids accepted to deliver the Gateway and four options of the New Deal for 18–24 year olds. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The New Deal is delivered in 143 areas, each with a local partnership whose method of delivery reflects local circumstances. Each partnership tendered and negotiated for its provision with different patterns of main and sub-contracts. Whilst I am unable, for reasons of commercial confidentiality, to provide details of individual contract prices, most should not vary greatly from the benchmark unit prices for each New Deal element set out in annex 1.

It is important to note that the actual unit price depends not just on the prices which are agreed for these elements but, for example, on how long people stay and their success in terms of achieving outputs which attract a payment.

The Employment Service will be reporting later this year on the overall financial performance of all Units of Delivery as part of our continuous improvement agenda.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex 1: New Deal for 18–24 year olds 1998–99

Function	*Unit cost per entrant (£)*
Gateway	228.26
Employment option	2,970
Full-time education and training option	2,300
Voluntary sector/environment task force options	2,750

Notes:

1. The figures represent GB-wide indicative planning assumptions and average unit prices.
2. The unit cost for Gateway is available for each Gateway entrant.
3. The total resource available will be dependent on the throughput of clients; these will differ between units of delivery.

Child Care Clubs

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the extra cost to public funds to register clubs for children aged up to 14 years and up to 16 years in the case of disabled children. [78282]

Ms Hodge: It is proposed that out of school clubs should seek approval from quality assurance organisations which have been accredited by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I do not anticipate any extra costs to public funds to arise from the approval process. There will be a small cost to public funds arising from the administration of the accreditation process. Quality assurance organisations are expected to charge childcare providers to cover the cost of administering their approval schemes.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the oral statement by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury on 17 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 1143–44, under which Education Act clubs making provision for eight to 14 year olds, and eight to 16 year olds in the case of disabled children, will be registered. [78283]

Ms Hodge: There will be no requirement for clubs making provision for children aged eight and over to be registered. The amendment to the Tax Credits Bill tabled on 17 March gives my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State the necessary power to set up a two tier approval scheme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will accredit appropriate organisations to administer an approval system for childcare providers. Childcare providers will be able to seek approval from accredited

quality assurance organisations. The details of the scheme will be set out in regulations made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Organisations which wish to become accredited will need to demonstrate that their approval schemes set standards in the following areas: the health and safety and welfare of children, including the employment of suitable staff; the quality of the activities offered to children; and equal opportunities.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the number of quality threshold assessors available to assess child care clubs for children aged up to 14 years and up to 16 years in the case of disabled children. [78290]

Ms Hodge: In deciding whether quality assurance organisations should be accredited to approve child care providers for the purposes of the child care tax credit, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will want to satisfy himself that the organisation has adequate arrangements to ensure sufficient trained quality assurance assessors are available.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate he has made of *(a)* the demand for child care clubs for children aged up to 14 years and up to 16 years in the case of disabled children and *(b)* the adequacy of current provision; [78291]

(2) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current geographical spread of child care clubs for children aged up to 14 years and up to 16 years in the case of disabled children in relation to projected demand. [78292]

Ms Hodge: Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships have been asked to produce local childcare audits. These audits represent the first ever comprehensive attempt to find out what forms of childcare are currently being used and the level of unmet demand in England.

The audits, which have been used to inform Early Years Development and Childcare Plans for 1999–2000, show that there is currently an unmet demand in many areas. £170 million from the New Opportunities Fund is being made available between 1999–2003 to create new out of school childcare places in England. Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships will provide advice on the extent to which bids for NOF funding are consistent with priorities identified in their Plan. The extra help with childcare costs through the childcare tax credit element of the Working Families Tax Credit will help schemes, particularly in disadvantaged areas, to maintain their viability.

Teachers' Salaries

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total cost of salaries of teachers in England and Wales in state schools in the last year for which figures are available. [78812]

Ms Estelle Morris: The total cost of salaries of teachers in England and Wales in state schools at March 1997 is estimated at £9.9 billion.

This is based on salaries for all teachers employed in the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special sector including pupil referral units. It excludes employer national insurance and pension contributions.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the proportion of gross domestic product spent on compulsory age state education in each of the years 1995–96 to 1999–2000. [78707]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 25 March 1999]:* The following table sets out figures for 1995–96 to 1997–98, the latest year for which outturn information is available. The figures represent recurrent spending on state schools across the UK expressed as a proportion of GDP. The resources announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review provide for the proportion of GDP devoted to education to rise over the Parliament, in fulfilment of the Government's manifesto commitment.

Percentage

Year	*Recurrent spending on state schools as a proportion of GDP*[1]
1995–96	2.9
1996–97	2.8
1997–98	2.8

[1] Includes spending on school sixth forms within secondary schools and nursery education within primary schools. Does not include capital expenditure.

Teaching Staff and Students (Ethnic Origin)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will provide a breakdown by ethnic origin and grade of *(a)* teaching staff at (i) primary, (ii) secondary and (iii) tertiary level and *(b)* students at university level. [79052]

Ms Estelle Morris: The answers are as follows.

(a) (i and ii) The ethnic origin of teaching staff at primary and secondary level is not available.

(a) (iii) The grade of teaching staff at tertiary level is not available. Table 1 gives teaching staff in Further Education colleges in England by ethnicity.

Table 1: Teaching staff in further education colleges, by ethnicity (headcount) England 1996–97

Ethnic origin	*Number of staff*[1]
White	91,400
Black Caribbean	1,000
Black African	500
Black Other	300
Indian	1,000
Pakistani	500
Bangladeshi	200
Chinese	200
Other Asian	700
Other	2,100
Not known	32,900
Total	130,700

[1] Staff numbers are given to the nearest hundred.

(b) Table 2 gives Higher Education enrolments in English Higher Education institutions by ethnic group.

Table 2. HE enrolments in English higher education institutions, by ethnic group (headcount) 1997–98

Ethnic group	*Number of students*
White	1,037,300
Black Caribbean	18,000
Black African	27,800
Black Other	7,900
Indian	42,100
Pakistani	19,700
Bangladeshi	5,400
Chinese	22,100
Asian Other	25,600
Other	25,200
Not known (UCAS code)	7,500
Unknown	12,100
Information refused	120,100
Information not yet sought	104,600
Missing	21,500
Total	1,496,900

Student numbers are given to the nearest hundred

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will list all those task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 which have set up *(a)* sub-groups, *(b)* working parties and *(c)* other subsidiary committees; [79263]

(2) if he will list for all task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 *(a)* their dates of establishment, *(b)* those which have issued final reports and their dates of publication, *(c)* those which have been terminated and their dates of termination and *(d)* for those bodies still in existence, expected reporting and termination dates. [79287]

Mr. Mudie: The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

School Sports Grounds

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice his Department issues to schools which have their own sports grounds on the use of those grounds by the local community; and if he will make a statement. [79058]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Individual school governing bodies control the use of their premises but, in doing so out of school hours, the law requires them to have regard to the desirability of making their premises available to the wider community. We value community use and want to see schools developing their community role. We are revising "Our School–Your School", which offers guidance on this matter, as part of a drive to promote community use.

New Deal (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the New Deal in the Greater London area. [79076]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 13 April 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about the progress of the New Deal in the Greater London area. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The New Deal has made an encouraging state in London. Government Statistical Service figures to the end of January 1999 show that in Greater London over 36,000 young people have joined the New Deal. Of these, nearly 6,000 have found unsubsidised jobs. Nearly, 7,000 have joined one of the four New Deal Options with 1,188 joining subsidised employment, 4,081 joining Full Time Education and Training and 1,726 joining the Voluntary Sector and Environment Task Force Options. The majority of remaining entrants are on the Gateway phase of the programme. In the older age group, over 20,000 people have joined the New Deal for long term unemployed people aged 25 or over, of whom over 1,300 have already found jobs and almost 1,000 have already taken up training or education opportunities. Of the remainder the great majority are, as we would expect at this stage, on the advisory phase of the programme.

Our aim is to build on this progress through our programme of continuous improvement, working with the New Deal partnerships in each of our Units of Delivery. This work is being supported by the London Employers Coalition which is focusing on continuous improvement and on increasing business participation in New Deal in London.

I hope this is helpful.

Sure Start

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when Derbyshire County Council will be able to bid for Sure Start funding. [79077]

Ms Jowell: On 19 January, I invited the first applications for Sure Start funding from 60 areas of England. I plan to issue further guidance on the next round later in the year.

Education (Middlesbrough)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions he has held with Middlesbrough Borough Council regarding improvements in education results; and if he will make a statement. [79411]

Ms Estelle Morris: Within the past twelve months, the Standards and Effectiveness Unit's advisers for Middlesbrough have had five meetings with the local education authority in relation to the authority's Education Development Plan (EDP) and a number of meetings to discuss Middlesbrough's Education Action Zone (EAZ), its literacy and numeracy targets, and other standards issues.

Middlesbrough has now established a rigorous process to support statutory target setting in order to make improvements on its results, and last week Middlesbrough's EDP was given approval for the full three years. I also understand that the work on the EAZ is progressing well.

Teachers Green Paper

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received concerning the length of time available for responses to the Green Paper on teachers. [79554]

Ms Estelle Morris: Very little comment has been made about the four months available for responding to the Green Paper, Teachers: Meeting the Challenge of Change.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to whom *(a)* the Green Paper on teaching and *(b)* the associated technical paper were distributed. [80093]

Ms Estelle Morris: Copies of the Green Paper, *Teachers: meeting the challenge of change*, and the *Technical consultation paper on pay and performance* were distributed to all schools in England (both headteachers and chairs of governing bodies), local education authorities in England, the main teacher unions and, in addition, to several hundred bodies with an interest education. In addition, approximately 880,000 copies of the Green Paper summary have been distributed.

Teachers' Pay Technical Paper

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which schools have been selected for consultation on the technical paper on teachers' pay; and on what basis were they chosen. [79381]

Ms Estelle Morris: The schools selected as the sample group for consultation on the Technical Consultation Document on Pay and Performance Management have been given the opportunity to request that their responses remain confidential. We therefore do not wish to pre-empt this by announcing the participating schools.

The sample was selected systematically from each of six school types: nursery (150 schools selected), primary (275), secondary (300), special (150), PRUs (150), and hospital schools (all). It covered a regionally representative range of LEAs, and avoided schools which had been selected to form the sample in other recent consultation exercises.

School Science

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make it his policy to collect information on expenditure by local education authorities on school science. [79538]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Government have no plan to introduce such a policy. It is not practicable to isolate expenditure by local education authorities on specific areas of the curriculum. Decisions on the allocation of resources between curriculum areas are a matter for individual schools.

Departmental Staff (Birth Certificates)

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for what purposes his Department and its executive agencies require a birth certificate to be furnished by (i) employees, (ii) contractors, (iii) those applying for employment or contracts and (iv) other persons. [79556]

Mr. Mudie: Before making any appointment, the Department must verify identity, age and nationality. Candidates have the option to produce a birth certificate to fulfil this requirement. It is not Departmental policy to ask contractors to produce Birth Certificates. A number of my Department's programmes have age eligibility criteria where again one of the applicants' options is to produce a Birth Certificate.

People's Panel

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the research commissioned from the People's Panel by his Department; and in each case what was the purpose of the research and what was its cost. [79555]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The People's Panel has been set up to consult the public about how public services are delivered, and to use their ideas to help improve them. The Department has commissioned 2 pieces of research to help us do that:

on the sources of help and advice on careers to young people at school. We wanted to know which were the most important to people, and what they thought could be done to improve the help and advice young people are given about their future careers. This was part of the first survey and was funded by the Cabinet Office who are responsible for setting up the People's Panel;

6 focus groups were set up to investigate parent's attitudes towards including value added information in school performance tables, and the format in which they should be provided. The cost of the work was £13,000. It will help us develop measures that are useful to parents.

School Funding

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that the extra money allocated by his Department for each of the schools in the boroughs of *(a)* Middlesbrough, *(b)* Stockton, *(c)* Redcar and Cleveland and *(d)* Hartlepool is passed on by the local education authority to each of the schools. [79659]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend has written to all English Local Education Authorities to urge them to ensure that the additional provision which we have made available is actually spent on education and, in particular, is used to support schools so that the resources can be spent directly on raising standards. We will be monitoring the financial returns of all authorities to see whether the cash increase in the education SSA has been used to support education, and how much has been passed through to schools.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate the additional money to be allocated to each school in the boroughs of *(a)* Middlesbrough, *(b)* Stockton, *(c)* Redcar and Cleveland and *(d)* Hartlepool from 1 April 1999 relative to that allocated in 1998–99. [79660]

Ms Estelle Morris: Local education authorities are currently in the process of submitting details of their budget proposals for the financial year 1999–2000 to the Department. I will write to the hon. Member when the figures he requests are available, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library.

Teachers' Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who are the members of the teachers' pension scheme long-term examination working group; when it last met; when it is due to meet next; and when its final report is due to be submitted to ministers. [79823]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Working Group is made up of representatives of:

Department for Education and Employment

Government Actuary's Department

Chairman and Secretary of the Teachers' Panel of the Teachers' Superannuation Working Party

National Union of Teachers

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

National Association of Head Teachers

Secondary Heads Association

National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers

National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education

Secretary of the Employers' Panel of the Teachers' Superannuation Working Party

National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers

Sixth Form Colleges' Employers' Forum

Association of Colleges

Universities and Colleges Employers Association

Grant-maintained Schools Advisory Committee

Independent Schools Council.

The Working Group last met on 10 December 1998. I have received the Working Group's report and am currently considering its conclusions and recommendations. No dates have been set for further meetings of the Working Group.

School Meals

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent by Derbyshire county council local education authority on subsidising school meals in each of the last 10 years. [79618]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows the difference between expenditure and income for all school catering services from 1990–91 to 1997–98. Comparable figures are not available before that date. From the financial year 1997–98, Derbyshire was reorganised into two local authorities, Derby and Derbyshire: figures for both are shown. Expenditure on, and income from, the school meal service will vary from year to year according to—among other factors—the proportion of children taking up an entitlement to free school meals.

£000

	Expenditure	Income	Difference
1990–91	22,688	7,560	15,128
1991–92	26,921	8,226	18,695
1992–93	28,192	9,873	18,319
1993–94	22,959	9,917	13,042
1994–95	22,906	9,700	13,206
1995–96	21,803	9,384	12,419
1996–97	21,306	9,199	12,107
Derbyshire			
1997–98	16,729	8,191	8,538
Derby			
1998–99	4,544	1,997	2,547

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the *(a)* total expenditure on, and *(b)* income from the local education authorities' school catering services in (i) Derbyshire, (ii) Nottinghamshire, (iii) Staffordshire, (iv) Surrey and (v) Hertfordshire in (1) 1994–95, (2) 1995–96, (3) 1996–97 and (4) 1997–98. [79619]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows total gross expenditure and total income for school catering from 1994–95 to 1997–98. Expenditure and income for the school meal service will vary according to the proportion of children entitled to free school meals.

£000

	Expenditure	Income
1994–95		
Derbyshire	22,906	9,700
Derby		
Staffordshire	17,318	9,784
Stoke-on-Trent		
Surrey	11,891	8,950
Hertfordshire	14,833	9,749
Nottinghamshire	19,892	8,346
1995–96		
Derbyshire	21,803	9,384
Derby		
Staffordshire	17,532	11,559
Stoke-on-Trent		
Surrey	11,259	8,985
Hertfordshire	14,430	10,138
Nottinghamshire	17,316	8,113
1996–97		
Derbyshire	21,306	9,199
Derby		
Staffordshire	17,846	10,910
Stoke-on-Trent		
Surrey	11,640	9,867
Hertfordshire	13,265	10,747
Nottinghamshire	17,399	8,159
1997–98		
Derbyshire	16,729	8,191
Derby	4,544	1,997
Staffordshire	13,728	9,011
Stoke-on-Trent	5,027	2,668
Surrey	12,301	10,315
Hertfordshire	14,313	14,526
Nottinghamshire	18,765	9,177

Environmentally Friendly Industries

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in what ways the University for Industry will be used to encourage the growth of new

environmentally friendly industries through the provision of training programmes which relate to environmental services and waste management. [79891]

Mr. Mudie: Environmental technology and services form one of four key sectors identified as initial priorities for Ufl Ltd's early activity. The growth rate in this sector is strong and there is considerable potential to create jobs, win exports and protect the environment. Ufl development work will target the 5,000 or so companies in these markets, many of which are small and recently established. They are likely to need high quality learning materials in a range of areas including general business and organisation capabilities, and technical, management, finance and export skills.

Monetary Policy Committee

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what occasions he has met members of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee; and what was discussed at each meeting. [79707]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the Governor of the Bank of England and other members of the Monetary Policy Committee in December 1997. They discussed a range of issues relating to employment and education.

New Deal (Unsubsidised Employment)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of those individuals currently participating in each New Deal option other than subsidised employment he estimates will move on to unsubsidised employment. [79822]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I expect a significant proportion of young people on New Deal to move into unsubsidised employment from the Full Time Education and Training (FTET), Voluntary Sector (VS) and Environmental Task Force (ETF) options. Thus far, relatively few young people have completed this part of the New Deal process as participants can spend up to a year on FTET and six months on VS and ETF.

National Minimum Wage (Job Advertisements)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what instructions he has issued to job centres to withdraw notices of vacancies advertised at less than the national minimum wage. [79698]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Tim Boswell, dated 13 April 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply direct to your question regarding the instructions that have been issued to Jobcentres to withdraw notices of vacancies advertised at less than the national minimum wage. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Guidance has been issued to Jobcentres and other relevant parts of the Employment Service explaining that, from 1 April, they must only process and display vacancies which comply with the requirements of the National Minimum Wage Act and its associated regulations. All Jobcentre Managers have been instructed to check that this guidance is being followed. Vacancy takes in Jobcentres will explain the requirements of the legislation to any employers who may seek to offer rates below the National Minimum Wage.

I hope this is helpful.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79651]

Mr. Mudie: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*. The requirements of the Ministerial Code also apply to Parliamentary Private Secretaries when attending any meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if people joining the New Deal for 18 to 25 year olds are compelled to state their educational qualifications. [80561]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Young people joining the New Deal are not compelled to provide information about their educational qualifications. However, this is routinely raised as a standard part of initial personal adviser interviews and there are few instances of the information not being supplied.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish statistics on the *(a)* employment and *(b)* benefit position of those who have completed a six month New Deal for 18 to 25-year-old option. [80562]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We publish statistics on various aspects of New Deal performance on a monthly basis. The destination of those who leave an Option is contained in table 11 of the New Deal Statistical First Release, which is held in the Library.

Youth Service

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he plans to issue his consultation paper on the future of the Youth Service; and if he will make a statement. [80264]

Mr. Mudie: We are currently reconsidering the nature and timing of our planned consultation on the future of the youth service in the light of our developing policies on support services for young people more generally. An announcement will be made in due course.

Learning Standards Fund

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out the criteria used to determine allocation to local education authorities from the National Grid for Learning Standards Fund. [80387]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Allocations from the National Grid for Learning Standards Fund have been made with reference to the criteria set out in Department for Education and Employment Circular 13/98—The Standards Fund 1999–2000, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the reason for the fall in modern apprenticeship starts over the calendar year 1998; and if he will make a statement. [79916]

Mr. Mudie: Information from Training and Enterprise Councils about Government-supported training in 1998 is not yet final. I expect the June revision of these figures to bring them closer to the total for 1997 and that the number of MA starts in the 1998–99 operational year will match that in 1997–98.

Students (Herefordshire)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students from Herefordshire are in receipt of grants for *(a)* full-time higher or further education and *(b)* part-time higher or further education; and if he will make a statement. [80262]

Mr. Mudie: The numbers of higher and further education awards in payment by Herefordshire Local Education Authority during the academic year 1997–98, the latest year for which figures are available, are shown in the table:

Number of higher education [1] and further education [2] awards made by Herefordshire [3] academic year 1997–98 [4]

	Number
Full-time[5] Higher Education awards	2,541
Part-time Higher Education awards	98
Further Education awards[5]	687

[1] Includes mandatory awards to personally eligible students attending full-time or sandwich courses leading to a first degree or comparable qualification, DipHE or HND courses and courses of initial teacher training; discretionary awards to students on courses eligible for mandatory awards but who do not fulfil the criteria for personal eligibility made under Section 1(6) of the Education Act 1962; and discretionary awards made under Section 2 of the Education Act 1962. Apart from certain courses of initial teacher training, only courses of full-time study are eligible for mandatory awards.

[2] Discretionary awards made under Section 2 of the Education Act 1962.

[3] Awards made to students normally domiciled in Herefordshire.

[4] Data for 1997–98 are provisional.

[5] Data are not collected separately for full-time and part-time awards.

Examination Papers

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the performance of Edexcel in handling examination papers; and if he will make a statement. [79920]

Mr. Mudie: Edexcel is a commercial organisation, independent of Government, and responsible for its own procedures for handling examination papers. However, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has responsibility for ensuring that qualifications will be accredited only if they meet stringent criteria, and for subsequently monitoring the activities of the awarding bodies.

The new accreditation criteria, which are being introduced this year, set out the necessary standards in the processes and procedures leading to awards and for ensuring high quality, consistency and rigorous standards in assessment and awarding.

At the Government's request, QCA is also implementing a package of reforms to enhance the transparency, independence, speed and accountability of the inquiries on results and appeals system covering GCSE, A level and GNVQ.

The new arrangements will be introduced in time to deal with cases arising from this summer's examinations.

Schools (Spending)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what spending his Department plans to allocate for *(a)* increased access to information and communication technology in schools, *(b)* more teaching assistants and *(c)* more office staff in the next four years. [79906]

Mr. Mudie: Public expenditure plans have not yet been set beyond 2001–02. Over the next three years, we plan to allocate £555m to local education authorities in England to continue the process of equipping and networking schools to the National Grid for Learning. In addition, schools and their teachers and pupils will benefit from the £400m announced in the Budget as part of the Government's national IT strategy. The £400m will help widen access to ICT by establishing a network of learning centres; introducing a pilot project to supply recycled computers to homes, with families on low incomes having to pay only a very small charge; and providing subsidised loans to teachers for purchasing computers.

We plan to allocate £350m over the next three years to provide an additional 20,000 teaching assistants in schools. We do not have plans for specific allocations for more office staff.

Wirral Metropolitan College

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to receive the report of the most recent Further Education Funding Council inspection of Wirral Metropolitan College. [80516]

Mr. Mudie: We expect to receive the Further Education Funding Council's Inspection report on Wirral Metropolitan College later this month.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received about the retirement package for the retiring principal of Wirral Metropolitan College. [80214]

Mr. Mudie: We have not received any representations about the retirement package for the former principal of Wirral Metropolitan College.

Tertiary Colleges (Retiring Principals)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidelines his Department issues concerning retirement financial arrangements for principals of tertiary colleges. [80215]

Mr. Mudie: The Further Education Funding Council has provided guidance concerning such arrangements in its financial memorandum with colleges. This emphasises, among other things, affordability and the need to secure value for money.

Village Schools

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the criteria for determining applications for change in status for small rural village schools. [79876]

Ms Estelle Morris: Criteria for determining applications for significant changes in the character of a school will differ according to the nature of the change. Factors taken into account when deciding whether or not to approve proposals for the closure of rural schools will include the accessibility of alternative schools; the standard of the school that is proposed for closure and the standards of any alternative schools; the overall supply of school places in the area and the likely future demand for places; the overall effect of the closure on the local community; the cost implications of the possible options; any points made by the Local Education Authority or by the school proposed for closure; and the views of parents and other interested parties.

SCOTLAND

Economic Diversification (Rural Areas)

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money has been spent in each of the last five years, in real terms, on *(a)* economic diversification in rural areas, *(b)* agricultural support indicating what percentage was from EU funds and *(c)* rural housing; what assessment he has made of the advantages of providing low-interest Government loans to encourage economic diversification in rural Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [68004]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 1 February 1999]:* Information on Central Government funds spent in each of the last five financial years is as follows:

(a) Spending related to Economic Diversification in Rural Areas

£ million

	Objective 1 and Objective 5b programmes [1]	*Programme Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands expenditure* [2]	*Total*
1993–94	4.0	79.3	83.3
1994–95	4.0	80.3	84.3
1995–96	3.6	79.1	82.7
1996–97	2.5	74.0	76.5
1997–98	3.6	77.0	80.6

[1] Total expenditure under the Rural Enterprise Programme, Highlands and Islands Agricultural Programme (excluding Crofting Township Development Scheme) and the Rural Diversification Programme.

[2] The enterprise agencies, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Scottish Enterprise (SE), do not attribute expenditure specifically to economic diversification. The HIE component of the aggregate figures above is based on actual spending under HIE's Growing Businesses programme which has as its objective an increase in the number, scale and competitiveness of businesses in the HIE area. All programme activities contribute to economic diversification. SE estimates that 16 per cent. of its project expenditure is spent in rural areas. The figures include an element of spend which is indicative of the level of support SE gives to businesses in rural localities within its area of operations.

Note:

Figures are at constant 1997–98 prices.

(b) Agricultural Support

Government spending on agricultural grants and subsidies is set out in the publication "Scottish Agriculture Output, Input and Income Statistics", copies of which are in the Library of the House. All of this expenditure is counted as UK public expenditure. In any year, the European Union's financial contribution to this spending is in the range of approximately 80–90 per cent.

In addition to this support, the Government made available an additional £46 million in December 1997 and £35 million in November 1998.

(c) Central Government expenditure on Rural Housing

£ million

	Housing [1]
1993–94	131
1994–95	132
1995–96	136
1996–97	111
1997–98	95

[1] These figures include Housing Support Grant, capital allocations made through the Housing Revenue Account (excluding receipts), Scottish Homes investment programme and the Capital Receipts Initiative (1997–98 only). They exclude personal subsidies such as Housing Benefit, Income Support for Mortgage Interest and Mortgage Interest Tax Relief. Figures are at constant 1997–98 prices.

(d) Low Interest Loans

Low interest loans are only one of a package of measures (including grants and equity investment) which the enterprise networks can use to provide financial support for enterprise and business development. The package of assistance designed for each case reflects the needs and opportunities of the individual applicant. The networks do not provide financial support where loan finance could otherwise be secured from the private sector.

From 1 July 1999, economic diversification, agriculture and housing will be matters for the Scottish Parliament: relations with the EU will continue to be reserved to Westminster.

Opinion Polls and Focus Groups

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the expenditure of his Department, its agencies and public bodies on opinion polling and focus groups for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; and if he will list the work carried out or planned for each year. [69267]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* Neither my Department nor its agencies have undertaken any Public Opinion Polls in the period concerned. Departments have used Focus Groups to elicit the public's views as part of the following research studies:

EID

Views of Parents on information required from schools and education authorities.

D of H

Acute Services Review.

DD

Public knowledge and perceptions of local government (for the Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament).

Development of Government Public Information Campaign relating to elections to the Scottish parliament.

Public views on the operation of the Scottish Parliament.

Review of Practice in Housing Management.

Survey of Travellers Views.

Evaluation of Rough Sleepers Initiative.

The Young Teenager and Road Safety.

AEFD

Car dependency in Rural Scotland.

Crime in Rural Scotland.

Migration in Rural Scotland.

Rural Water Review (Private supplies).

HD

Evaluation of the Jurors Leaflet.

Teenwise Alcohol Projects.

Hamilton Child Safety Initiative.

Violence and Harassment of Gay Men.

Joint Statement on Crown Witnesses.

Impact and effectiveness of Reporter decision making.

Evaluation of the Keep Warm This Winter Campaign.

Victims reactions to Victim Information Leaflets.

Evaluation of Dundee Family Project.

Views from people with learning disabilities and their carers about service.

Quality of care and quality of life for people in residential homes.

The estimated cost of the focus groups is as follows:

Year	*£000*
1996–97	25
1997–98	50
1998–99	95
1999–2000	[1]35

[1] Planned to date

Detailed information for non-departmental bodies sponsored by The Scottish Office is not held centrally.

Local Authorities (Public Relations)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what amount was spent on public relations and hospitality in each local authority in Scotland in the last year for which figures are available. [74983]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* This information is not held centrally.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

City of Glasgow Council

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, indicating in each case the source, the amounts of public money spent in the City of Glasgow Council area in each year since the new city council came into being and the estimated amounts for 1998–99 and 1999–2000. [75711]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter and annexes in the House of Commons Library.

Exports and Imports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the last 10 years in real terms *(a)* the value of exports from Scotland to and *(b)* the value of imports to Scotland from (i) other United Kingdom countries, (ii) the European Union, (iii) the United States of America and (iv) the rest of the world. [76081]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The Government do not maintain separate export or import figures for Scotland, as it is an integral part of the United Kingdom and we do not consider business between any part of the UK to be exports or imports. The following Scottish manufactured export figures are based on data, funded by Scottish Trade International and maintained by the Scottish Council Development and Industry.

Scottish manufactured exports

£ million

Year	*European Union*	*USA*	*Rest of world*	*Total*
1997	11,670	2,091	5,497	19,258
1996	10,756	2,224	5,435	18,415
1995	10,454	1,608	5,254	17,316
1994	7,843	1,430	4,991	14,264
1993	6,101	1,430	4,009	11,540
1992	5,687	1,174	2,821	9,682
1991	5,379	1,003	2,451	8,833
1990	4,967	940	2,667	8,574
1989	4,215	925	2,524	7,664
1988	4,156	827	2,183	7,166

For the last two years, with encouragement and support from Scottish Trade International, SCDI has produced export figures for the service sector and for the Primary sector. These figures are also derived from survey work but do not include the same level of detail as is provided for manufactured exports. The total figures are as follows:

Service sector (including tourism)

Year	*£ million*
1997	2,070
1996	1,955

In 1997, some 41 per cent. of service sector exports went to the EU with 25 per cent. to the USA.

Primary sector (including oil and gas)

Year	£ million
1997	4,789
1996	6,090

A destination breakdown is not available.

Schools (Expenditure)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average expenditure in Scottish *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools (1) in total and (2) in each council area on (i) books, (ii) educational equipment and materials and (iii) other equipment (x) in each council area in 1997–98 and 1998–99 and (y) in total in (A) 1983–84, (B) 1988–89 and (C) each year since 1993–94 at 1998–99 prices. [76623]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 March 1999]:* The information requested up to the year 1996–97 is given in the table, which has been compiled from local authority financial returns. There can be variations in the recording of expenditure under the two headings of books and expenditure. It is, therefore, possible that some expenditure on books may be included under expenditure on equipment or vice versa. Expenditure on other equipment is not identified separately in local authority returns to The Scottish Office. Information on actual expenditure by education authorities in Scotland in financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99 is not yet available.

Ministers have announced since February that additional resources for books, totalling £7.8 million, are being made available in 1998–99 on top of local authority existing provision.

Expenditure per pupil on text and library books and on educational tools, equipment and materials adjusted to 1998–99 prices using the GDP deflator

£

	Primary		Secondary	
Year	Books	Equipment	Books	Equipment
1983–84	17.04	13.80	25.30	48.07
1988–89	16.57	19.53	27.37	74.01
1993–94	10.98	38.25	16.06	90.36
1994–95	9.56	42.99	12.95	93.34
1995–96	9.09	47.64	13.72	95.70
1996–97	6.47	42.81	9.09	84.46

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mortgage Repossession Orders

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mortgage repossession orders there were in each court district in each of the months of *(a)* January, February and March 1997, *(b)* January, February and March 1998, *(c)* May, June, July, August, September, October, November and December 1998 and *(d)* January 1999. [76118]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* Figures in relation to repossession of property by mortgage lenders have been collected by the courts since a revised system of collecting Civil Judicial Statistics was instituted on 1 January 1994. The figures for the number of mortgage repossession orders in each Court District in each of the months of *(a)* January, February and March 1997, *(b)* January, February and March 1998, *(c)* May, June, July, August, September, October, November and December 1998 and *(d)* January 1999 are shown in the tables.

Court	1 January 1997	1 February 1997	1 March 1997
Aberdeen	29	13	20
Airdrie	17	18	14
Alloa	3	2	1
Arbroath	8	3	5
Ayr	9	12	15
Banff	3	1	1
Campbeltown	0	1	0
Cupar	5	2	3
Dingwall	2	1	2
Dornoch	0	0	0
Dumbarton	13	6	13
Dumfries	1	4	5
Dundee	16	9	13
Dunfermline	21	18	12
Dunoon	0	2	0
Duns	0	1	2
Edinburgh	29	41	42
Elgin	3	3	6
Falkirk	4	7	3
Forfar	3	1	1
Fort William	0	0	0
Glasgow	56	70	58
Greenock	3	3	3
Haddington	9	2	9
Hamilton	25	24	23
Inverness	0	6	4
Jedburgh	4	2	2
Kilmarnock	17	21	17
Kirkcaldy	15	22	10
Kirkcudbright	3	1	2
Kirkwall	0	1	1
Lanark	6	9	0
Lerwick	0	0	0
Linlithgow	15	17	0
Lochmaddy	0	1	0
Oban	1	0	4
Paisley	1	0	2
Peebles	0	0	2
Perth	11	6	6
Peterhead	7	2	4
Portree	0	0	0
Rothesay	1	0	1
Selkirk	0	3	2
Stirling	5	8	0
Stonehaven	0	3	7
Stornoway	0	0	0
Stranraer	3	2	1
Tain	0	0	0
Wick	0	0	0
Grand Total	348	348	316

Court	1 January 1998	1 February 1998	1 March 1998
Aberdeen	16	19	21
Airdrie	22	11	17
Alloa	2	5	4
Arbroath	0	11	3
Ayr	9	7	15
Banff	0	0	2
Campbeltown	1	1	2
Cupar	2	1	5
Dingwall	1	1	2
Dornoch	1	0	0
Dumbarton	17	21	15
Dumfries	7	1	2
Dundee	5	17	10

Court	1 January 1998	1 February 1998	1 March 1998
Dunfermline	19	14	12
Dunoon	1	2	5
Duns	1	2	1
Edinburgh	34	55	53
Elgin	5	2	2
Falkirk	11	9	6
Forfar	1	4	2
Fort William	0	1	0
Glasgow	52	86	70
Greenock	7	8	2
Haddington	10	3	4
Hamilton	1	3	6
Inverness	5	10	12
Jedburgh	1	2	1
Kilmarnock	24	14	28
Kirkcaldy	7	22	12
Kirkcudbright	0	0	0
Kirkwall	0	0	1
Lanark	3	6	3
Lerwick	0	4	0
Linlithgow	15	23	11
Lochmaddy	0	1	1
Oban	0	2	0
Paisley	29	41	31
Peebles	0	1	1
Perth	9	9	11
Peterhead	6	11	5
Portree	0	0	1
Rothesay	0	1	2
Selkirk	3	3	5
Stirling	6	2	5
Stonehaven	3	2	1
Stornoway	1	2	1
Stranraer	1	1	2
Tain	2	0	1
Wick	0	0	0
Grand Total	340	441	396

Court	1 May 1998	1 June 1998	1 July 1998	1 August 1998	1 September 1998	1 October 1998	1 November 1998	1 December 1998
Aberdeen	8	6	18	15	9	14	23	14
Airdrie	18	16	42	18	29	19	27	22
Alloa	4	2	4	11	10	8	9	6
Arbroath	5	2	5	3	5	6	4	6
Ayr	12	12	18	13	16	7	10	12
Banff	4	2	1	3	2	4	1	2
Campbeltown	0	0	2	2	1	1	0	1
Cupar	1	6	5	0	4	2	2	6
Dingwall	3	0	0	2	5	3	1	2
Dornoch	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Dumbarton	22	12	15	15	10	18	16	17
Dumfries	3	9	7	4	6	2	0	5
Dundee	19	18	17	19	11	16	19	5
Dunfermline	14	17	24	12	22	7	17	16
Dunoon	2	0	2	3	2	8	3	0
Duns	1	0	3	1	2	1	0	3
Edinburgh	64	56	54	61	54	41	25	35
Elgin	9	3	0	0	1	4	2	5
Falkirk	13	6	9	18	23	13	18	7
Forfar	2	3	4	2	4	1	2	2
Fort William	0	2	1	1	1	1	3	0
Glasgow	77	94	109	92	98	86	89	135
Greenock	0	9	12	7	9	5	8	8
Haddington	8	4	11	5	4	10	5	4
Hamilton	3	3	2	16	4	0	27	10
Inverness	5	5	12	7	13	9	10	12
Jedburgh	1	5	3	2	2	3	5	5
Kilmarnock	20	21	28	19	22	31	30	21
Kirkcaldy	15	23	26	22	18	22	21	13
Kirkcudbright	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	2
Kirkwall	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Lanark	2	4	4	1	13	5	12	7
Lerwick	1	0	0	1	1	3	0	2
Linlithgow	13	25	18	30	31	15	29	16
Lochmaddy	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oban	2	2	2	2	0	4	1	0
Paisley	48	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Peebles	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Perth	3	9	17	5	9	7	13	6
Peterhead	1	8	8	5	5	3	3	3
Portree	3	0	0	0	2	1	0	1
Rothesay	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
Selkirk	0	2	3	5	4	3	7	0
Stirling	8	5	8	1	12	3	6	4
Stonehaven	1	1	0	3	0	1	4	1
Stornoway	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Stranraer	5	2	2	5	2	4	0	1
Tain	2	2	1	2	0	0	1	0
Wick	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Grand Total	423	399	499	437	468	393	454	419

Court	1 January 1999
Aberdeen	13
Airdrie	26
Alloa	6
Arbroath	7
Ayr	3
Banff	2
Campbeltown	2
Cupar	3
Dingwall	6
Dornoch	1
Dumbarton	15
Dumfries	3
Dundee	13
Dunfermline	15
Dunoon	4
Duns	0
Edinburgh	41
Elgin	4
Falkirk	6
Forfar	2
Fort William	1
Glasgow	80
Greenock	3
Haddington	2
Hamilton	6
Inverness	5
Jedburgh	1
Kilmarnock	30
Kirkcaldy	12
Kirkcudbright	1
Kirkwall	0
Lanark	5
Lerwick	1
Linlithgow	11
Lochmaddy	1
Oban	1
Paisley	0
Peebles	0
Perth	6
Peterhead	4
Portree	1
Rothesay	1
Selkirk	4
Stirling	2
Stonehaven	1
Stornoway	2
Stranraer	3
Tain	0
Wick	0
Grand Total	356

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Pupils

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary for Scotland what is his estimate of (i) the number and (ii) the percentage of children in primaries *(a)* one, *(b)* two and *(c)* three in each local authority taught in classes of more than 31 pupils in (1) 1997–98, (2) 1998–99, (3) 1999–2000, (4) 2000–01 and (5) 2001–02. [76153]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 15 March 1999]*: The information requested is set out in the table. It is not possible to provide estimates for the years 1999–2000, 2000–01 or 2001–02. The figures for 1998 are provisional.

	September 1997						September 1998					
	P1		P2		P3		P1		P2		P3	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Aberdeen City	227	10.5	446	21.4	570	29.2	225	10.9	287	14.3	163	8
Aberdeenshire	126	5.6	160	9	315	16.2	191	9	410	22.6	349	18.6
Angus	124	11.7	193	19.8	31	3.1	158	15.5	254	26	220	21.8
Argyll and Bute	62	8.8	127	22.2	255	45.9	31	4.7	131	24.5	160	23
Clackmannanshire	33	4.9	64	11.3	64	13.1	65	11.6	94	15.1	64	11.3
Dumfries and Galloway	322	29.8	227	25.6	420	38.9	95	8.8	223	23.6	160	16.4
Dundee City	568	33.8	561	34.6	580	38.3	351	24.2	369	24.9	362	22.8
East Ayrshire	162	11.4	189	13.9	349	26	221	16.3	189	14.7	126	9.2
East Dunbartonshire	288	20.5	478	35.9	452	33.5	318	23.4	285	22.3	671	51.1
East Lothian	127	12.4	192	18.5	192	20.3	159	16	256	29	191	19.1
East Renfrewshire	361	30.3	655	57.4	446	41.9	432	35.9	553	50.4	483	40.2
Edinburgh, City of	1,195	27.9	1,694	40.9	1,681	42.1	1,166	28.3	1,246	31.6	1,536	38.4
Eilean Siar	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Falkirk	450	28.1	673	45.3	646	42.6	293	19	415	29.7	611	41.3
Fife	155	4.3	318	10.4	758	23	94	2.7	124	4	345	10.5
Glasgow City	1,327	20.4	1,217	20.4	1,484	26.3	1,486	24.9	1,315	24	1,284	22.4
Highland	201	12.4	190	12.3	284	18.5	95	5.8	96	7	96	6.4
Inverclyde	159	15.2	193	19	258	25.1	129	13.4	128	12.8	190	20.1
Midlothian	160	16.7	98	11.1	351	37.6	—	—	126	15.1	126	14
Moray	94	9.4	161	18.1	285	37	—	—	62	6.8	124	13.6
North Ayrshire	258	16.2	345	21.8	383	24.7	163	10.6	320	22.1	348	22.7
North Lanarkshire	589	16.1	706	21.1	1,035	32.2	424	11.6	419	13.2	750	22.7
Orkney Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Perth and Kinross	378	32	196	18.7	348	29.8	226	18.3	318	27	382	31.9
Renfrewshire	878	40.7	461	24.8	685	32.5	549	27.2	682	34.1	653	34.2
Scottish Borders	158	18.2	129	15.6	157	19.4	71	8.4	32	4.2	191	24.1
Shetland Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Ayrshire	255	22.1	260	22.8	516	48.4	478	39.6	286	26.3	287	25.8
South Lanarkshire	352	10.5	414	14	799	27.6	418	12.1	318	11	602	21
Stirling	63	7.6	125	17	189	25.9	96	13.5	155	20.6	254	30.6
West Dunbartonshire	187	16.8	320	31.4	159	17	96	9	158	16.5	384	38.1
West Lothian	516	26.5	709	38.2	773	43.8	777	41.6	613	34.5	613	34.3

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of children in each local authority taught in classes of 31 or more pupils in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001–02. [76143]

Mrs. Liddell: *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The information requested is set out in the table. It is not possible to provide estimates for 1999–2000, 2000–01 or 2001–02. The figures for 1998 are provisional.

	September 1997		*September 1998*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Aberdeen City	3,767	23.8	2,983	19.1
Aberdeenshire	2,222	10.4	2,506	11.7
Angus	1,429	15.3	1,431	15.4
Argyll and Bute	1,215	15.6	1,058	13.6
Clackmannanshire	780	17.2	993	22
Dumfries and Galloway	2,381	18.5	1,509	11.8
Dundee City	3,583	29.2	3,111	25.9
East Ayrshire	1,926	16.9	1,780	15.9
East Dunbartonshire	2,873	27	2,656	25
East Lothian	1,026	12.9	1,212	15.1
East Renfrewshire	3,444	40.1	3,407	39.1
Edinburgh, City of	8,713	28.5	8,513	28.1
Eilean Siar				
Falkirk	3,432	27.9	3,415	27.6
Fife	4,950	13.2	3,230	10.6
Glasgow City	9,551	19.5	9,172	19.3
Highland	1,818	9.5	1,400	7.4
Inverclyde	1,331	17	1,389	18.2
Midlothian	1,462	19.7	1,052	14
Moray	1,363	16.9	815	10.2
North Ayrshire	2,563	20.3	2,690	21.4
North Lanarkshire	5,330	17.9	5,154	17.5
Orkney Islands	32	1.7	31	1.7
Perth and Kinross	1,856	17.2	2,177	20
Renfrewshire	4,786	30.3	4,719	30.4
Scottish Borders	889	10	937	10.5
Shetland Islands				
South Ayrshire	2,771	29.2	2,666	28.4
South Lanarkshire	4,329	16.1	3,796	14.1
Stirling	630	9.2	890	13
West Dunbartonshire	1,589	17.9	1,501	17
West Lothian	4,652	31.4	4,387	29.6

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Company Licences

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for *(a)* small and medium enterprises and *(b)* larger companies (i) all licences and permits issued by his Department and its agencies to companies permitting them to carry out their business, (ii) the cost of each such licence or permit in (A) 1997–98 and (B) 1999–2000 and (iii) the current number of companies which are in receipt of each such licence or permit. [76854]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The information requested is rather lengthy; therefore, I am placing copies in the Library of the House.

Timber Industry

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures his Department has taken to assist the export of softwoods by the UK softwood industry; and if he will make a statement. [77203]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 23 March 1999]:* My Department has had no requests for export assistance from the softwood industry. The Scottish softwood industry would, of course, be eligible for the range of export assistance available from Scottish Trade International, the Government's export agency in Scotland.

Scottish processors are the most important market for Scottish softwoods, buying almost 80 per cent. of the harvest. The remaining 20 per cent. goes to processors in other parts of the UK. There have been no sales of Scottish softwoods (or hardwoods) outside the UK for some years.

Scottish Parliament Building

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated cost of the furnishings and fittings of the new Scottish Parliament buildings, indicating separately the cost of information technology and television facilities; and which of these are included in the £50 million cost referred to his answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) of 28 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *385*. [77798]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 25 March 1999]:* An initial estimate of £3½ million was made in March 1998 for budgetary purposes to cover the cost of purchasing furniture and fittings for the new Scottish Parliament building. The actual cost of the furniture cannot be calculated until the building designs are finalised, and will depend on the state of the market at the time of purchase and the extent to which we can re-use furniture from the interim accommodation.

An initial estimate of £4 million was made in March 1998 for budgetary purposes to cover the purchase of Information and Communication Technology equipment, including televisual production equipment. The actual cost of the ICT equipment will depend on operational experience of the systems being used in the interim accommodation, on the decisions made by the Parliament itself in the light of that experience, and the state of the ICT market at the time of purchase. It is likely that a substantial portion of the hardware and software installed at the interim accommodation will be re-used at Holyrood, and this will also have a bearing on the final costs.

Neither of these estimates is included in the estimated construction cost budget of £50 million excluding VAT and fees referred to in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 28 January.

Home Repossessions

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many home repossessions there were in Scotland in each year since 1992. [77765]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 25 March 1999]:* Figures in relation to repossession of property by mortgage lenders have only been collected by the courts since a revised system of collecting Civil Judicial Statistics was instituted on 1 January 1994. Figures are not available prior to this time.

Figures for the number of home repossession orders granted in Scotland for each year since 1994 are shown in the table. Not all lenders who are granted decrees actually enforce them.

Court	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Aberdeen	15	90	202	186	178
Airdrie	107	106	138	200	244
Alloa	12	37	31	36	70
Arbroath	20	7	14	37	60
Ayr	39	106	98	142	149
Banff	0	17	16	15	23
Campbeltown	7	12	7	7	13
Cupar	33	32	52	44	37
Dingwall	16	26	14	17	22
Dornoch	3	4	1	1	4
Dumbarton	47	125	105	106	197
Dumfries	28	58	54	42	50
Dundee	69	94	165	149	168
Dunfermline	96	124	132	157	185
Dunoon	15	14	13	18	29
Duns	8	10	16	11	15
Edinburgh	245	419	501	536	574
Elgin	28	30	58	35	37
Falkirk	68	112	142	118	142
Forfar	9	8	29	19	31
Fort William	0	4	6	4	11
Glasgow	479	689	872	869	1,051
Greenock	3	8	50	46	80
Haddington	60	64	82	88	74
Hamilton	109	236	253	171	75
Inverness	23	62	64	80	110
Jedburgh	11	21	21	22	36
Kilmarnock	88	194	216	221	268
Kirkcaldy	53	132	155	176	224
Kirkcudbright	11	11	19	16	5
Kirkwall	5	4	13	4	2
Lanark	0	49	58	52	66
Lerwick	2	4	3	2	12
Linlithgow	91	180	209	160	251
Lochmaddy	2	2	7	1	3
Oban	8	8	12	12	18
Paisley	36	203	176	198	149
Peebles	10	9	10	7	6
Perth	44	76	109	84	108
Peterhead	48	35	65	53	62
Portree	4	2	8	4	8
Rothesay	5	5	2	7	10
Selkirk	18	16	17	24	38
Stirling	37	39	34	47	66
Stonehaven	21	32	42	40	22
Stornoway	0	1	13	5	9
Stranraer	18	20	20	21	26
Tain	5	7	13	15	11
Wick	2	10	2	0	1
Grand Total	2,058	3,554	4,339	4,305	5,030

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Civil Servants (Appraisal)

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the appraisal performance markings awarded to civil servants in 1998 for *(a)* each agency in his Department and *(b)* the Department broken down by (i) grade, (ii) gender, (iii) ethnicity, (iv) part-time/full-time working and (v) disability; and for (1) each agency and (2) the Department whether the Cabinet Office's four fifths rule for detecting potential adverse impact was applied to the appraisal markings of civil servants in the 1998 report round. [78144]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 26 March 1999]:* Information for the 1998 appraisal round is shown in the tables.

Departments and Agencies have authority to determine their own performance review arrangements for their staff outside the Senior Civil Service, subject to certain conditions. Within The Scottish Office, the Scottish Prison Service and Historic Scotland Executive Agencies have adopted different review arrangements from the remainder of the department.

In order to protect individual anonymity, it has been necessary to combine the results for the agencies other than Scottish Prison Service and Historic Scotland.

The four-fifths rule is not an absolute measure, but may be an indicator that further analysis is required. It is not the approach currently used within The Scottish Office. Instead, annual statistical analyses of all appraisal markings are routinely carried out, and the results reported to top management. This includes analysis by gender and grade. Detailed analysis for the 1998 round is not yet complete.

From 1 July 1999, responsibility for the Civil Service is a reserved matter, but staff appraisal will be a delegated matter.

Scottish Office Core

Percentage gaining performance mark

	Box 1	Box 2	Box 3	Box 4/5
Grade				
Band A	6.8	58.4	34.1	0.6
Band B	5.5	64.5	—	—
Band C	13.1	67.3	—	—
Gender				
Female	8.8	63.2	—	—
Male	5.6	61.4	32.6	0.5
Ethnicity				
Ethnic	0.0	50.0	—	—
Other	7.2	62.3	30.2	0.3
Full time/Part time				
Full Time	7.0	62.1	30.5	0.4
Part Time	8.7	64.4	26.9	0.0
Disability				
Not Disabled/Not Known	7.2	62.4	30.1	0.3
Self-Declared Disabled	—	57.8	—	—
Total	7.1	62.3	30.2	0.4

[1] Figures withheld to avoid disclosure

Scottish Office Core and Agencies (excluding HS and SPS)

Percentage gaining performance mark

	Box 1	Box 2	Box 3	Box 4/5
Grade				
Band A	6.4	58.9	34.0	0.7
Band B	5.4	63.4	—	—
Band C	12.5	67.6	—	—
Gender				
Female	8.4	63.6	27.8	0.3
Male	5.3	60.6	33.5	0.5
Ethnicity				
Ethnic	0.0	52.9	—	—
Other	6.8	62.0	30.8	0.4
Full time/Part time				
Full Time	6.7	61.8	31.1	0.4
Part Time	7.5	64.7	27.8	0.0

Scottish Office Core and Agencies (excluding HS and SPS)

Percentage gaining performance mark

	Box 1	*Box 2*	*Box 3*	*Box 4/5*
Disability				
Not Disabled/Not Known	6.8	62.1	30.7	0.4
Self-Declared Disabled	—	58.5	—	—
Total	6.7	62.0	30.9	0.4

— Figures withheld to avoid disclosure

Scottish Prison Service

Percentage gaining performance mark

	A rating	*B rating*	*C/D rating*
Grade			
Band A	10.1	77.5	12.4
Band B	7.3	71.5	21.2
Band C	5.6	68.3	26.1
Band D	14.7	80.7	4.6
Band E	21.2	74.9	4.0
Band F/G	17.2	73.5	9.3
Band H/I	40.0	60.0	0.0
Gender			
Female	15.2	68.5	16.3
Male	12.7	77.3	10.0
Ethnicity			
Ethnic	—	—	—
Other	13.1	76.0	10.9
Full Time/Part Time			
Full Time	13.2	75.9	11.0
Part Time	0.0	—	—
Disability			
Not Disabled/Not Known	13.4	75.4	11.2
Self-Declared Disabled	6.8	86.9	6.3
Total	13.1	75.9	11.0

— Figures withheld to avoid disclosure

Historic Scotland

Percentage gaining performance mark

	Box 1	*Box 2*	*Box 3/4*
Grade			
Band A	11.3	—	—
Band B	20.4	79.6	0.0
Band C	19.1	—	—
Band D	43.9	—	—
Band E	41.7	58.3	0.0
Band F/G	27.8	72.2	0.0
Band H/I	—	—	0.0
Gender			
Female	31.2	68.8	0.0
Male	17.6	80.6	1.8
Ethnicity			
Ethnic	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	21.1	77.6	1.3
Full Time/Part Time			
Full Time	21.1	77.6	1.3
Part Time	—	—	0.0
Disability			
Not Disabled/Not Known	21.2	77.5	1.3
Self-Declared Disabled	—	—	0.0
Total	21.1	77.6	1.3

— Figures withheld to avoid disclosure

Senior Civil Service

Percentage gaining performance mark

	Box 1	*Box 2+/2*	*Box 3+/3*	*Box 4/5*
Grade				
Senior Civil Service	13.3	58.2	28.5	0.0
Gender				
Female	19.0	47.6	33.3	0.0
Male	12.4	59.9	27.7	0.0
Ethnicity				
Ethnic	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	13.0	58.2	28.5	0.0
Full-Time/Part-Time				
Full Time	12.0	54.4	26.6	0.0
Part Time	—	54.5	—	0.0
Disability				
Not Disabled/Not Known	13.3	58.2	28.5	0.0
Self-Declared Disabled	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	13.3	58.2	28.5	0.0

— Figures withheld to avoid disclosure

Radioactive Waste

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations will be undertaken by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in respect of the proposed incineration of Ministry of Defence radioactive waste at Grundons, Colnbrook. [78999]

Mr. Macdonald: In addition to consulting my right hon. Friend, and the Health and Safety Executive, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) also consulted the bodies shown in the list.

In addition, SEPA placed notices in the Helensburgh Advertiser and the Edinburgh Gazette.

Bodies consulted

Argyll and Bute Council

Copeland Borough Council

Cumbria County Council

Slough Borough Council

Argyll and Clyde Health Board

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board

West of Scotland Water Authority

Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee

The National Radiological Protection Board

Committee on the Medical Aspects of Radiation

The Environment Agency.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has commissioned on the health effects of the incineration of Ministry of Defence radioactive waste on people living in the vicinity. [79001]

Mr. Macdonald: My right hon. Friend has commissioned no specific research. However, when authorising the Colnbrook facility to receive radioactive waste, the Environment Agency sought and received assurance from the site operator that the radiological implications were satisfactory.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultation will be undertaken with local authorities through whose areas Ministry of Defence radioactive waste is to be transported for eventual incineration at Grundons, Colnbrook. [79004]

Mr. Macdonald: Current regulations on the transport of radioactive material in Great Britain place no requirement on either the consignor or the transporter to consult with local authorities through whose area a shipment is taking place.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations have been received by *(a)* him and *(b)* the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on the proposal to incinerate Ministry of Defence radioactive waste at Grundons, Colnbrook. [79002]

Mr. Macdonald: My right hon. Friend received two sets of representations and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency received seven sets from consultees and others.

The representations covered the health hazards of disposal, lack of consultation, suitability of material for incineration, proximity of incinerator to other premises, transport issues, nature of the decision-making procedures, availability of incineration facilities in Scotland, the position post-devolution, and the link between radioactive waste and the nuclear weapons programme.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research he has commissioned into the health effects on the population of those areas through which Ministry of Defence radioactive waste is to be transported for eventual incineration at Grundons, Colnbrook. [79005]

Mr. Macdonald: My right hon. Friend has commissioned no specific research into this area. A report by the National Radiological Protection Board, entitled "The Radiation Exposure from the Normal Transport of Radioactive Materials within the United Kingdom" (NRPB-R255), covered road and rail shipments in general. It found the radiological exposure arising from transport to be very slight in comparison with that from natural background radiation. A copy of that report is in the House Library.

Court Proceedings

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what estimate he has made for each area of the average time between receipt of police reports at the office of the Procurator Fiscal and the commencement of proceedings, in each of the last five years; [78803]

(2) in each of the last five years, for those police reports made to procurators fiscal for which there were proceedings, what was the average time, area by area, between receipt of the report and commencement of proceedings for *(a)* district court summary cases, *(b)* sheriff court summary cases, *(c)* solemn cases at sheriff court and *(d)* High Court cases. [78805]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* A single average for all cases is not readily available. Nor are we able to provide without disproportionate cost an average time for solemn cases.

I have prepared tables containing average time between receipt of reports of crime and service of complaints in relation to summary cases in Sheriff and District Courts by Procurators Fiscal in each of the last 5 years (up to February 1999). As the information is rather lengthy, I am placing copies in the House Library.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of police reports made to procurators fiscal in each year since 1994; and how many of those were marked "no proceedings". [78804]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* I have prepared tables containing the total number of reports of crime made to Procurators Fiscal in each year since 1994 (to February 1999), and those marked "no proceedings". As the information is rather lengthy, I am placing copies in the House Library.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Birth Certificates

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for what purposes his Department and its executive agencies require a birth certificate to be furnished by (i) employees, (ii) contractors, (iii) those applying for employment or contracts, and (iv) other persons. [79557]

Mr. Dewar: My Department and its agencies require to see birth certificates of prospective employees only, to ensure that they meet the Nationality requirements for appointment to the Home Civil Service and for salary and pension purposes. There are no requirements to see birth certificates for contractors.

For other persons, my Department does not require to see birth certificates. However, certain agencies require a birth certificate where the functions for which they are responsible make that necessary. The Scottish Office Pensions Agency requires to see birth certificates of members of the pension schemes it operates. The Student Awards Agency for Scotland needs sight of birth certificates for students who claim dependants allowances.

Health Board Expenditure

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a detailed breakdown of expenditure by each health board in Scotland for the year until 31 July 1998. [79357]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* The table gives details of the health boards expenditure for the latest financial year available which is 1997–98.

£000

Health Boards	HCH expenditure	FHS expenditure	Other expenditure	Total
Argyll & Clyde	253,260	105,086	10,100	368,446
Ayrshire & Arran	211,948	87,871	11,411	311,230
Borders	70,257	23,481	1,856	95,594
Dumfries & Galloway	94,466	36,312	3,109	133,887
Fife	188,589	79,608	9,299	277,496
Forth Valley	148,262	64,628	7,203	220,093
Grampian	293,394	108,888	17,414	419,696
Greater Glasgow	585,186	223,675	40,262	849,123
Highland	128,335	50,512	9,775	188,622
Lanarkshire	298,646	125,364	11,308	435,318
Lothian	454,032	165,260	22,205	641,497
Orkney	13,601	4,878	2,122	20,601
Shetland	15,840	5,234	1,586	22,660
Tayside	268,582	94,486	7,224	370,292
Western Isles	25,880	7,841	1,776	35,497
Scottish Totals	3,050,278	1,183,124	156,650	4,390,052

Note:
HCH—Hospital & Community Health
FSH—Family Health Services

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Outpatient Appointments

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of people awaiting an outpatient appointment at each Scottish hospital on (i) 31 January 1997, (ii) 31 January 1998 and (iii) 31 January 1999; and in each case, how many outpatients had been waiting for *(a)* three to six months and *(b)* more than six months. [78734]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* Information on waiting lists is collected only for hospital inpatients and day cases. Data are available quarterly on first outpatient referrals and the length of time that patients waited for their first outpatient appointment. The number of patients who received a first outpatient appointment within three to six months, and more than six months following a General Medical Practitioner/General Dental Practitioner referral, by NHS Trust, for the quarters ending 31 December 1996, 1997 and 1998, is provided in the table.

NHS in Scotland: Waiting times for first outpatient appointment from general medical practitioner (GMP)/general dental practitioner (GDP) referral

	Quarter ending 31 December 1996		Quarter ending 31 December 1997		Quarter ending 31 December 1998	
NHS Trust/directly managed unit	Number of patients who waited 3–6 months	Number of patients who waited over 6 months	Number of patients who waited 3–6 months	Number of patients who waited over 6 months	Number of patients who waited 3–6 months	Number of patients who waited over 6 months
South Ayrshire Hospital	147	21	757	96	811	54
North Ayrshire and Arran Hospital	121	9	816	54	250	13
Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care	21	3	16	2	2	1
Borders General Hospital	450	88	363	208	340	33
Borders Community Health Services	0	0	7	0	17	9
Royal Alexandra Hospital	1,944	550	1,138	1,236	977	223
Inverclyde Royal	140	8	528	193	662	47
Renfrewshire Healthcare	13	23	52	13	23	15
Lomond Healthcare	200	8	247	21	676	27
Argyll and Bute	205	118	355	92	392	83
Queen Margaret Hospital	985	74	1,244	159	1,415	309
Fife Healthcare	313	35	58	4	16	1
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals	889	64	2,242	220	1,779	409
Southern General Hospitals	1,519	532	2,302	647	1,999	986
Yorkhill	764	65	1,793	399	130	55
Victoria Infirmary	2,186	262	2,092	146	2,316	234
West Glasgow Hospitals University	2,429	324	2,526	462	3,349	958
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University	1,893	553	2,894	632	3,799	974
Stobhill	532	33	906	63	849	36
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Service	66	17	76	7	113	10
Glasgow Dental Hospital and School	842	220	1,306	226	1,581	333
Raigmore Hospital	914	338	1,231	429	781	574
Caithness and Sutherland	150	64	220	20	176	66
Highland Communities	12	6	12	2	17	5
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals	850	105	1,526	468	1,473	564
Law Hospitals	1,081	330	1,849	472	1,540	192
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals	867	190	1,143	225	1,463	358

NHS in Scotland: Waiting times for first outpatient appointment from general medical practitioner (GMP)/general dental practitioner (GDP) referral

NHS Trust/directly managed unit	Quarter ending 31 December 1996		Quarter ending 31 December 1997		Quarter ending 31 December 1998	
	Number of patients who waited 3–6 months	Number of patients who waited over 6 months	Number of patients who waited 3–6 months	Number of patients who waited over 6 months	Number of patients who waited 3–6 months	Number of patients who waited over 6 months
Lanarkshire Healthcare	31	15	50	9	73	23
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals	2,393	1,011	2,257	537	2,692	553
Grampian Healthcare	395	51	646	41	520	69
Moray Health Services	127	28	350	24	454	25
Orkney Health Board Unit	2	1	10	2	19	0
West Lothian	1,067	223	1,187	377	1,635	410
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	2,537	615	2,767	835	3,879	1,717
Edinburgh Sick Children's	3	2	22	0	117	1
Western General Hospitals	398	162	826	249	615	398
East and Midlothian	154	26	266	72	230	45
Edinburgh Healthcare	50	34	121	17	18	1
Dundee Teaching Hospitals	2,271	232	1,683	140	2,574	439
Perth and Kinross Healthcare	458	102	995	183	1,305	159
Dundee Healthcare	70	49	88	51	90	23
Angus	351	25	388	56	367	126
Stirling Royal Infirmary	110	9	844	42	771	189
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary	772	301	888	178	273	187
Central Scotland Healthcare	2	1	1	2	14	22
Western Isles Health Unit	80	1	133	33	5	1
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals	191	191	419	91	200	67
Dumfries and Galloway Community Health	0	0	0	1	1	0
Shetland Hospitals and Community Services Unit	27	0	22	1	15	2

Provisional

Source:

ISD, Scotland

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Maternity Services

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of providing NHS maternity services in Scotland for each of the last five years. [79584]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is as follows:

	£ million
1994–95	168.6
1995–96	173.0
1996–97	177.5
1997–98	181.9
1998–99	Not yet available

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Caesarean Sections

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the cost to the NHS of a Caesarean section in Scotland; [79585]

(2) what is the cost to the Scottish NHS of a 1 per cent. increase in the annual rate of Caesarean sections. [79586]

Mr. Galbraith: This information is not collected centrally.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Breast Feeding

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial provision has been made for the promotion of breast feeding in each of the last three years in Scotland. [79587]

Mr. Galbraith: The figures in the table show the financial provision directly related to the promotion of breastfeeding in the last three years. They include expenditure in relation to the National Breastfeeding Adviser in Scotland, who provides training, advice and support to NHS personnel and lay workers and acts as a facilitator to local breastfeeding initiatives.

These figures represent only a small part of our investment to promote breastfeeding, which is increasingly being integrated with mainstream health education campaigns. For example, a major publication on pregnancy and early childrearing 'Ready, Steady, Baby' produced and widely distributed by the Health Education Board for Scotland in 1998–99 included a section on breastfeeding; and a recent edition of *O, Magazine*—which is sent to all S1 and S2 school pupils—featured breastfeeding in relation environmental, social and health issues. Breastfeeding is also linked with the criteria for eating establishments to achieve a 'Healthy Choices Award' and is identified as a workplace issue, with employers encouraged to provide appropriate facilities within 'Scotland's Health At Work' award scheme. A dedicated website on breastfeeding to provide information for both public and professional use has also been set up.

The Government are fully committed to the promotion of breastfeeding, which is universally accepted as the best form of nutrition for infants. Our recent White Paper "Towards a Healthier Scotland" identified the health of

children as a key area for action. It recognised that breastfeeding and good care in early life can significantly improve a child's chances in life; and it set out proposals for a health demonstration project to focus on the promotion of health from birth and throughout the first 5 years of childhood. One of the potential aims of this project will be to encourage good nutrition through breastfeeding.

	£
1996–97	75,000
1997–98	76,000
1998–99	60,000

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79625]

Mr. Macdonald: The available information is currently being collected by Departments in response to the Environmental Audit Committee's request for information on environmental appraisals as part of its second inquiry into the Greening Government Initiative.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Green Belt Land

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the green belt land in each local authority area. [79850]

Mr. Macdonald: 1. There are currently 6 areas in Scotland designated as greenbelt land. These are shown in table 1.

Table 1

Greenbelt	*Area (to nearest ha)*
Edinburgh	15,869
Glasgow	109,917
Falkirk and Grangemouth	3,803
Ayr, Prestwick and Troon	3,024
Aberdeen	23,039
Clackmannan	981
Total	156,633

2. Greenbelt areas broken down by local authority are contained in table 2.

Table 2

Local authority	*Area of green belt (to nearest ha)*
Aberdeenshire	13,283
Aberdeen City	9,756
Clackmannanshire	981
Stirling	1,544
Argyll and Bute	2,787
Falkirk	3,786
West Dunbartonshire	2,617
North Lanarkshire	22,187
East Dunbartonshire	10,365

Table 2

Local authority	*Area of green belt (to nearest ha)*
City of Edinburgh	9,995
West Lothian	31
Inverclyde	13,721
East Lothian	1,777
Renfrewshire	19,661
Glasgow City	3,510
Midlothian	4,094
North Ayrshire	94
South Lanarkshire	22,837
East Renfrewshire	10,478
East Ayrshire	21
South Ayrshire	3,024
Coastal Sliver	84
Total	156,633

Note:
As at March 1999—The Scottish Office Geographic Information Service

The boundaries of individual greenbelts are defined in the relevant local authorities' local plans which can be viewed at the offices of the authority concerned.

The figures given are based on the geographical overlay of two datasets from different sources held by the Scottish Office Geographical Information Service (SOGIS). The different scales of these two datasets cause very small differences in the figures for greenbelt areas, known as "slivers". Coastal slivers are areas where the greenbelt data crosses the coastline.

As from 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Child Minding

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each local authority area, the number of pre-school child minding places available and express the figure as a percentage of the total number of pre-school children in the area. [80218]

Mr. Galbraith: The table gives the available information. Some authorities have yet to submit their returns.

Registered child minding places for children under 5, as at 30 November 1997

Local authority	*Number of registered places*	*Number of registered places as a percentage of under 5 population (%)*
Aberdeen City	735	6
Aberdeenshire	1,266	9
Angus	854	13
Argyll and Bute	459	9
Clackmannanshire	181	6
Dumfries and Galloway	295	3
Dundee City	n/a	n/a
East Ayrshire	433	6
East Dunbartonshire	698	11
East Lothian	n/a	n/a
East Renfrewshire	n/a	n/a
Edinburgh, City of	n/a	n/a
Eilean Siar	66	4
Falkirk	721	8
Fife	1,964	10
Glasgow City	n/a	n/a
Highland	n/a	n/a

Registered child minding places for children under 5, as at 30 November 1997

Local authority	*Number of registered places*	*Number of registered places as a percentage of under 5 population (%)*
Inverclyde	171	3
Midlothian	n/a	n/a
Moray	539	10
North Ayrshire	346	4
North Lanarkshire	655	3
Orkney Islands	66	6
Perthshire and Kinross	966	13
Renfrewshire	438	4
Scottish Borders	n/a	n/a
Shetland Islands	128	8
South Ayrshire	462	8
South Lanarkshire	979	5
Stirling	509	11
West Dunbartonshire	235	4
West Lothian	n/a	n/a

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what regulations or guidelines he has issued regarding child minders and premises for child minding, with particular reference to the number of children and the number of child minders who can be accommodated on any premises. [80219]

Mr. Galbraith: The Scottish Office issued guidance to local authorities on the regulation of services for children under the Children Act 1989 in June 1991. That guidance recommends adult:child ratios for child minding and other forms of day care for children under the age of 8. Advice on the number of child minders who may be accommodated on any particular premises is not, however, provided in the guidance.

We issued a consultation paper on the regulatory arrangements for early education and child care in March this year. Follow up action could include revised guidance.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

EU Grants

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff in his Department are involved in processing the payment of *(a)* European Regional Development Fund grants and *(b)* Social Fund grants. [79934]

Mr. Macdonald: Five and one half full time equivalent members of staff process the final payment of European Development Fund grants and 2 full time members of staff European Social Fund grants. In addition, 3 members of staff provide management and support services to the final payments process.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department pays out grants under EU funds before receiving the money from the EU. [79935]

Mr. Macdonald: Yes. Since February 1999, it has been Government policy to make payment of European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund grants on receipt of valid claims from project sponsors. It is expected that this will lead to improvements in the overall payments process, with grant funds being paid earlier to project sponsors.

From 1 July 1999 the administration of European Structural Funds will be the responsibility of the Scottish Administration.

Traffic Projections

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what national guidelines are available to local authorities to help them to calculate the probable volume of traffic from a proposed development. [79918]

Mr. Macdonald: Guidelines are published by the Institution of Highways and Transportation on the preparation of Transport Impact Assessment (TIA) Reports. These are widely accepted as the national standards. A local authority consortia also maintain and update continuously a UK National Database of trips generated by different types of development. These data are used in the preparation of a TIA.

A TIA report would normally be requested by the local authority from a developer in support of a planning application. The impact, if any, on trunk roads would be included within such reports.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Police Officers (Ethnic Origin)

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown of the ethnic origin of police officers in each rank in each force in Scotland. [80650]

Mr. McLeish: The available information, which relates to officers from the ethnic minority communities and is for 31 March 1998, is shown in the table.

	Inspector	*Sergeant*	*Constable*	*Total*	*Ethnic officers as percentage of total strength*
Central	—	—	2	2	0.28
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—	0
Fife	—	—	2	2	0.24
Grampian	1	—	1	2	0.16
Lothian and Borders	—	1	5	6	0.23
Northern	—	—	1	1	0.15
Strathclyde	—	1	34	35	0.49
Tayside	—	—	3	3	0.26
Total	1	2	48	51	0.34

No one from the ethnic minority communities has been identified as holding rank above that of Inspector.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the ethnic breakdown is of police officers in each force in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [79932]

Mr. McLeish: The numbers and proportion of ethnic minority officers are shown in the table.

	31 March 1998	*Percentage ethnic officers of total police strength*
Central	2	0.01
Dumfries and Galloway	0	0
Fife	2	0.01
Grampian	2	0.01
Lothian and Borders	6	0.04
Northern	1	0.01
Strathclyde	35	0.23
Tayside	3	0.02
Total	51	0.34

The recruitment and retention of ethnic officers in Scotland will be addressed in responding to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report.

From 1 July 1999, this will be matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Inward Investment

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the overseas companies by sector which located business in Glasgow in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998 and the total number of jobs created in each category as a result. [80007]

Mr. Dewar: All our dealings with inward investors are undertaken on a commercially confidential basis and it would not therefore be appropriate to publish details of individual projects except in cases where details of the project have been announced by the company itself.

The following table contains details of the inward investment projects attracted to Glasgow in 1997 and 1998 where the company in question is overseas-owned and where the project has been the subject of a public announcement.

Company	*Jobs announced*	*Sector*
1997		
Clintrials Research Ltd. (USA)	240	Healthcare
Eaton Ltd. (USA)	100	Services
1998		
TeleTech Europe Ltd. (USA)	500	Services
Cable and Wireless Communications (USA)	400	Services
Yoshitomi Pharmaceutical Ind. (Japan)	12	Healthcare
Tasco Europe Ltd. (Netherlands)	400	Services
FirstTel Systems Corporation (USA)	50	Software

Note:
The job figures are based on information provided by the companies concerned at the time of the investment decision and take no account of subsequent developments

In addition, there were a further 3 projects by overseas-owned companies which were not publicly announced. These projects involved the planned creation of over 20 new jobs and the safeguarding of over 500 existing jobs.

There has also been a significant level of inward investment in Glasgow by companies based in other parts of the UK.

The figures for total inward investment in Glasgow—both by overseas-owned and UK-owned companies—show that, in 1997 and 1998, the city has attracted 22 projects involving the planned creation or safeguarding of nearly 4,000 jobs.

As from 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the number of patients with multiple sclerosis in each health board area who would benefit from the provision of beta-interferon in Scotland. [80010]

Mr. Galbraith: It is not possible to estimate the number of patients with multiple sclerosis in each Health Board who would benefit from the provision of Beta-Interferon.

By no means all patients with the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis benefit from the use of this drug and decisions as to individual patients' eligibility for this treatment depend on the clinical judgment of the medical practitioners concerned.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions he has had with health boards regarding the prescription of beta-interferon; what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the effectiveness of beta-interferon in the treatment of patients with multiple sclerosis in Scotland; and if he will increase the resources available to health boards to fund the provision of beta-interferon to patients with multiple sclerosis; [80009]

(2) how much funding has been allocated to support research into the causes and treatment of multiple sclerosis in each of the last three years. [80011]

Mr. Galbraith: In 1995, The Scottish Office Department of Health (SODoH) issued guidance to health boards covering the use of beta-interferon for the treatment of multiple sclerosis. The guidance states that the costs of prescribing beta-interferon for suitable patients are expected to be met from within health board allocations, taking account of local priorities.

We have not funded research into the causes or treatment of multiple sclerosis in the past 3 years, and we have never funded research on the effectiveness of beta-interferon as a treatment. This is because no quality proposals on these subjects have been received. The Chief Scientist Office (CSO) within the SODoH is responsible for encouraging and supporting research aimed at improving the health of the people of Scotland and the services provided by the NHS in Scotland. CSO would be

happy to receive innovative, quality proposals on these subjects, which would be assessed in the usual way by an external, independent, peer review body.

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients suffering from multiple sclerosis were prescribed beta-interferon by each health board in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* 1998. [80008]

Mr. Galbraith: The information for Scotland for the years 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998 is shown in the table.

In order not to disclose information that may relate to an individual patient the data are presented on a national basis and covers 14 of the 15 Health Boards. One Health Board was unable to provide the information in the desired format.

Year	*Number of patients*
1995	1
1996	4
1997	15
1998	97

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish parliament.

Coronary Heart Disease

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is taking to reduce the incidence of coronary heart disease in Scotland. [80006]

Mr. Galbraith: Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) continues to be one of the clinical priorities of the NHS in Scotland, as is show by the establishment last autumn of the CHD Task Force, which is looking into all aspects of the disease. I announced on 5 February a £7m CHD initiative to tackle all aspects of the disease, from primary prevention to cardiac rehabilitation.

The White Paper 'Towards a Healthier Scotland', published on 17 February, focused on a number of major health topics, including CHD, and announced our new target of reducing the age standardised mortality rate from the disease in people under 75 by 50 per cent. between 1995 and 2010, from 143 to 72 deaths per 100,000 population.

One of the main vehicles for achieving this target is the demonstration project "The Heart of Scotland", outlined in the White Paper. The project will concentrate on primary prevention, and seek to disseminate best practice throughout Scotland, with the objective of driving down the rate of CHD.

Other important White Paper initiatives, relevant to reducing the incidence of CHD, include action to implement the measures in the White Paper 'Tobacco Kills'; accelerate the ongoing work to improve diet; reduce alcohol misuse; and encourage greater physical activity.

In addition, the Health Education Board for Scotland will step up its national media campaign which addresses the lifestyle factors which contribute to coronary heart disease.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish parliament.

Police Training

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research has been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated by the Scottish Office in respect of racial and cultural awareness training for police officers since May 1997. [80649]

Mr. McLeish: There has been no such research commissioned but the present arrangements for training police officers in Scotland in racial awareness and cultural diversity will be addressed in responding to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Specialist Breast Cancer Unit

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the specialist breast cancer units in Scotland. [80005]

Mr. Galbraith: Detailed information is not held centrally. The information available suggests that breast clinics are held in most of the main teaching hospitals in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and Inverness as well as in the majority of district general hospitals throughout Scotland.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many offenders have been given drug treatment and testing orders in each month since implementation of the orders; how many drug treatment centres are available in each local authority area; and if he will make a statement. [79870]

Mr. McLeish: The implementation of a 2-year pilot scheme in Glasgow for the introduction of Drug Treatment and Testing Orders is due to commence within 3 months. No orders have been made to date. The question of the most suitable arrangements for treatment provision is one of the issues currently being addressed by the implementation team. Options under consideration range from a centralised approach to one involving a group of agencies with relevant expertise in this field.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the estimated cost is of a drug treatment and testing order per offender; what the average cost is of a custodial sentence in such cases; and if he will make a statement. [79933]

Mr. McLeish: The estimated cost of a drug treatment and testing order is anticipated to be approximately £6,000 per offender. The annual cost of retaining a prisoner in custody during 1997–98 was £26,170.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Police Officers

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many police officers there were *(a)* in each force and *(b)* in total on the last date for which figures are available. [80105]

Mr. McLeish: The information is shown in the table.

	31 December 1998
Central	719
Dumfries and Galloway	446
Fife	841
Grampian	1,226
Lothian and Borders	2,621
Northern	667
Strathclyde	7,186
Tayside	1,148
Total	14,854

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Prisons (Drug-free Units)

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those Prison Service establishments which have drug-free wings or units; and if he will make a statement. [80110]

Mr. McLeish: All Scottish Prison Service sites have drug-free areas, including the newly opened privately run prison, HMP Kilmarnock. At Shotts, the main establishment has both drug-free living accommodation and enhanced drug-free workplaces. The subsidiary establishments, HM Unit Shotts and the National Induction Centre, do not have drug-free accommodation because of the nature of these establishments and their particular regimes. Both offer prisoners facilities and support to become drug-free.

After 1 July, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Police Duties (Private Companies)

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to allow private companies to undertake functions currently undertaken by police officers. [80042]

Mr. McLeish: We currently have no such plans but the Government have a commitment to reduce any unnecessary burdens on the police and we would be happy to consider any initiatives put to us by Chief Constables.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

CCTV Projects

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money was spent on CCTV projects in each of the last three years; what is the expected expenditure on CCTV projects over the next two years; and if he will make a statement. [80039]

Mr. McLeish: The following expenditure has been incurred by The Scottish Office in respect of CCTV projects in Scotland under the CCTV Challenge Competition in each of the last three years.

Year	*Amount £000*
1996–97	1,829
1997–98	1,920
1998–99	1,496

A further £1.5 million has been awarded to CCTV projects for 1999–2000. Funding of £1.5 million will also be available for 2000–01 but the Competition will be expanded to include projects other than CCTV which aim to tackle wider issues of community safety.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Hamilton Child Safety Initiative

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his Department's research into the Hamilton Child Safety Initiative. [79931]

Mr. McLeish: In October 1997, Strathclyde Police, in partnership with South Lanarkshire Council, set up the Hamilton Child Safety Initiative (HCSI) within 3 peripheral housing estates in the town of Hamilton. The HCSI was a response to community concerns about the safety of young children, especially those under 12, out alone on the streets after dark. Secondary aims of the Initiative were to reduce opportunities for juvenile crime and disorder and to reduce the fear of crime in the communities concerned.

Research was commissioned by Strathclyde Police and The Scottish Office to evaluate the impact of the HCSI. A Researching Findings paper was published on 15 October 1998 followed by the full research report on 11 February 1999. Both publications have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Fine Defaulters

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women received prison sentences for fine default in each of the last five years; what was the average length of sentence; what was the average amount of fine which was outstanding; what was the average cost of imprisonment and other cost to the public; and if he will make a statement. [79930]

Mr. McLeish: The information which is available on the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women receiving prison sentences for fine default by length of sentence and amount of fine outstanding is provided in the tables. (Data are not meanwhile available for 1998).

Fine default receptions to penal establishments by sex and length of sentence, 1993–97

Length of sentence	1993		1994		1995		1996		1997	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total	8,878	738	8,174	701	6,808	701	8,332	667	9,983	737
Less than 7 days	1,151	102	1,400	152	1,003	150	1,113	83	1,197	88
7 days	3,515	353	3,466	368	2,805	341	3,638	348	4,511	383
8–13 days	797	48	864	47	807	61	976	67	1,197	58
14 days	1,516	126	1,567	98	1,481	115	1,872	131	2,238	161
15–29 days	995	45	593	26	550	25	596	32	676	38
30 days/1 month	592	54	90	2	25	2	12	—	14	2
31–59 days	198	6	150	5	106	5	97	6	125	7
60 days/2 months	64	4	11	1	2	—	6	—	4	—
Over 60 days	50	—	33	2	29	2	22	—	21	—

Fine default receptions to penal establishments by sex and fine outstanding, 1993–97

Fine outstanding	1993		1994		1995		1996		1997	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total	8,878	738	8,174	701	6,808	701	8,332	667	9,983	737
Less than £50	633	63	476	70	366	43	391	22	383	35
£50-less than £100	1,835	171	1,627	190	1,209	193	1,336	129	1,636	118
£100-less than £200	3,017	292	2,682	249	2,057	253	2,564	268	3,145	286
£200-less than £500	2,778	201	2,748	182	2,546	196	3,267	216	3,919	260
£500-less than £1,000	512	10	519	6	535	12	643	30	772	36
£1,000-less than £2,500	94	1	102	3	81	4	107	2	116	2
£2,500-less than £5,000	6	—	15	1	12	—	10	—	9	—
£5,000 or more	3	—	5	—	2	—	14	—	3	—

Average cost per prisoner place [1]

	£
1993–94	26,006
1994–95	26,479
1995–96	25,786
1996–97	26,744
1997–98	26,170

[1] Calculated on a financial year (to end March) basis.

Police Funding

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the real terms change in funding for the police, excluding expenditure on police pensions, in each of the last three years; and what is the expected real terms change in spending over the years of the comprehensive spending review *(a)* excluding pensions and *(b)* in total. [80040]

Mr. McLeish: The Secretary of State pays police specific grant at 51 per cent. of net eligible expenditure by police authorities. Overall expenditure is determined by the level of Grant Aided Expenditure set by the Secretary of State and subsequently by the budgets set by police authorities.

The figures for police grant are shown in the following table. The figure for 1997–98 includes £3.5 million for policing the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Year	Cash £000	Year-on-year percentage change	Real terms £000	Year-on-year percentage change
1996–97	[1]259,165	—	280,049	—
1997–98	[1]287,633	10.98	302,932	8.17
1998–99	[2]337,500	—	345,938	—
1999–2000	[2]351,900	4.27	351,900	1.72
2000–01	[2]365,600	3.89	356,683	1.36
2001–02	[2]376,700	3.04	358,548	0.52

[1] Excludes expenditure on police pensions.
[2] Includes pensions expenditure which cannot be identified separately at this time.
Note:
The cash figures have been recalculated to show equivalent real term figures at 1999–2000 prices.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Prison Population

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the prison population was *(a)* in each Prison Service establishment and *(b)* in total on the last date for which figures are available; and if he will list those establishments which were officially overcrowded. [79864]

Mr. McLeish: The information is correct as at Friday 2 April which is the last time statistics were formally gathered.

	Population	Percentage of design capacity
Barlinnie	1,233	130.75
Cornton Vale	215	99.08
Dumfries	119	79.33
Dungavel	92	68.15
Greenock	254	109.01
Kilmarnock	69	13.80
Longriggend	172	97.73

	Population	Percentage of design capacity
Low Moss	363	91.67
NIC	52	96.30
Penninghame	90	91.84
Shotts	452	97.84
Shotts Unit	9	75.00
Aberdeen	181	111.04
Castle Huntly	121	80.67
Edinburgh	748	117.43
Friarton	68	75.56
Glenochil	421	84.88
Glenochil YOI	154	88.51
Inverness	115	107.48
Noranside	93	68.89
Perth	468	107.34
Peterhead	297	100.68
Peterhead Unit	7	70.00
Polmont	471	111.61
All Scotland Total	6,264	

Police (Efficiency Targets)

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action his Department will take if police forces do not achieve targets for efficiency gains; and if he will make a statement. [80043]

Mr. McLeish: Efficiency savings will be monitored by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary as part of their statutory inspection of each police force. Chief constables will be expected to respond in their annual reports to any comments or recommendations about efficiency savings made by HM Inspectorate in their reports to the Secretary of State on force inspections.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Prisoners

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average number of hours per day that prisoners were locked in their cells in each of the last three years *(a)* per prison establishment, and *(b)* in the Prison Service as a whole; and if he will make a statement. [80038]

Mr. McLeish: Figures covering the information required are not routinely collated or held. It is, however, the Government's policy to maximise the opportunities for prisoners to engage in purposeful activities, including work, outside their cells, and, to that end, they have in recent years set the Scottish Prison Service targets for prisoner programme participation.

After 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Crime (Zero Tolerance)

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the policy of zero tolerance for particular crimes; what proposals he intends to implement which are based on zero tolerance approaches; and if he will make a statement. [79869]

Mr. McLeish: No assessment has been made by The Scottish Office of the policy of zero tolerance in relation to certain crimes. However, the Government are satisfied that the strong measures they have introduced on handguns, sex offenders, racial harassment and anti-social behaviour will be successful. The Government's paramount concern is public safety and the way in which crime in Scotland is being tackled is set out in "A Safer Scotland: Tackling Crime and its Causes" which was published on 9 February. Copies of the publication were placed in the House of Commons Library.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Highlands and Islands Transitional Funding

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the allocation of cover for the recently announced transitional funding for the Highlands and Islands will be made through the Scottish Block. [80091]

Mr. Macdonald: As happens at present for the existing programmes, the allocation of public expenditure cover for the special European Structural funds programme for the Highlands and Islands will be one of the elements of the former Scottish Block which will make up the Assigned Budget of the Scottish Administration.

From 1 July 1999, the administration of European Structural Funds will be the responsibility of the Scottish Administration.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the structural funds in each year since 1974 were *(a)* allocated for cover to the Scottish Office DEL and its previous equivalents through the Scottish Block arrangement; and *(b)* applied using specially negotiated agreements; and for those years where specially negotiated agreements were reached if he will list (i) that amount allocated for cover to the DEL and its previous equivalents under these agreements and (ii) the proportion this represented of the total structural fund cover. [80090]

Mr. Macdonald: Public expenditure provision for all European Regional Development Fund or Social Fund expenditure for which the Scottish Office was responsible in the period since 1974 has been within the Scottish Office DEL and its previous equivalents. There have been no "specially negotiated agreements" covering the application for European Regional Development Fund or European Social Fund receipts.

From 1 July 1999, the administration of European Structural Funds will be the responsibility of the Scottish Administration.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list (i) the total European structural fund allocation to Scotland in each year since 1974 in cash and real terms and (ii) the share of the overall UK structural fund allocation that this amount represented in each year. [80089]

Mr. Macdonald: The information is set out in the table.

For the period 1975 to 1988, the European Commission approved individual European Regional Development Fund projects and it is the value of the award of these projects which is recorded. The figures for the years 1989 to 1999 reflect the programme allocation from the Commission.

Million euro

Year	European structural funds allocation to Scotland		Share of UK structural funds allocation
	Cash	Real terms	Percentage
1975	17.900	82.321	28
1976	24.150	97.716	25.4
1977	22.950	81.740	25
1978	37.750	121.039	24.8
1979	58.900	161.714	22.5
1980	46.760	108.571	16.9
1981	127.400	270.144	36.6
1982	129.600	257.004	28
1983	143.640	272.231	31.2
1984	174.070	313.427	27
1985	117.300	200.625	19.2
1986	126.000	208.993	22.5
1987	131.130	206.492	20.6
1988	143.450	211.558	24
1989	101.320	139.446	23.7
1990	130.945	167.128	12.3
1991	207.038	248.230	14.5
1992	141.505	164.547	8.2
1993	156.337	177.196	9.9
1994	140.023	156.148	7.2
1995	223.566	241.333	10.4
1996	256.897	269.352	11.2
1997	315.269	333.872	13.4
1998	575.323	583.221	23.3
1999	402.907	408.713	15.2

Notes:

1. For the period 1975 to 1989, the figures are exclusively ERDF.
2. The years 1990 to 1999 include ERDF and ESF, as well as EAGGF and FIFG which are in the Objective 1 and 5b Programmes.
3. From 1990 to 1993, ESF was the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (formerly the Secretary of State for Employment). Before 1990, ESF was administered by the European Commission and Scottish figures are not available.
4. The figures have been converted to current prices using HM Treasury deflator tables dated 22 December 1998.

From 1 July 1999, the administration of European Structural Funds will be the responsibility of the Scottish Administration.

Schools (Books)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the total estimated capital expenditure on school textbooks in Scotland in each of the next three years; and if he will list the amount estimated to be spent by each Scottish local authority for each year; [79816]

(2) if he will list the total capital expenditure on the school library book stock in Scotland for each year since 1992; and if he will list the amount spent in each local authority area for each year; [79817]

(3) if he will list the total estimated capital expenditure on school library book stock in Scotland in each of the next three years; and if he will list the amount estimated to be spent by each Scottish local authority for each year; [79818]

(4) if he will list the total capital expenditure on school textbooks in Scotland for each year since 1992; and if he will list the amount spent in each Scottish local authority area for each year. [79832]

Mrs. Liddell: Purchases of school text and library books would normally be made by local authorities from current expenditure resources. The available information on current expenditure by local authorities on school text and library books is given in tables 1 and 2, which are derived from local authority financial returns. The returns do not distinguish between expenditure on text books and on library books. The table also shows a combined figure for books and equipment because not all authorities' returns identify separately spending on books and it is possible that some expenditure on books may be included under equipment or vice versa. 1996–97 is the latest year for which information is currently available.

The Government have made available to education authorities during the financial year 1998–99 additional resources of £7.8m for schools to purchase books and other written material for school libraries as shown in table 3.

Table 1: Current expenditure by education authorities on school books and equipment

£000 at outturn prices

Region	1992–93		1993–94		1994–95		1995–96	
	Books and equipment	(of which books)	Books and equipment	(of which books)	Books and equipment	(of which books)	Books and equipment	(of which books)
Borders	1,351	216	1,373	213	1,582	0	1,470	0
Central	2,931	100	2,897	125	2,793	60	2,733	62
Dumfries and Galloway	2,198	260	2,577	295	2,533	317	2,284	261
Fife	2,739	540	2,795	2,136	2,730	2,094	3,294	2,412
Grampian	6,488	0	6,972	0	7,158	0	7,630	0
Highland	3,141	3,141	2,786	2,786	2,885	1,491	2,633	1,481
Lothian	5,371	1,350	5,671	1,352	6,676	1,585	7,594	1,691
Strathclyde	21,449	5,548	20,059	1,118	21,932	1,191	26,133	1,117
Tayside	3,581	608	4,545	670	4,026	676	3,569	656
Orkney	166	50	152	0	284	0	290	0
Shetland	471	135	678	119	534	0	511	0
Western Isles	549	91	525	99	633	242	595	192
Scotland	50,405	12,039	51,030	8,913	53,766	7,656	58,736	7,872

Notes:

1. The books and equipment figures include expenditure on text and library books and educational tools equipment and materials in local authority nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.
2. Where expenditure on books is shown as £0 it should be assumed that the expenditure is included as equipment.

Table 2: Current expenditure by education authorities on school books and equipment 1996–97

	£000 at outturn prices	
Councils	*Books and equipment*	*(of which books)*
Aberdeen, City	1,675	0
Aberdeenshire	2,924	0
Angus	1,134	0
Argyll and Bute	1,481	121
Clackmannanshire	453	0
Dumfries and Galloway	2,112	290
Dundee	1,199	115
East Ayrshire	1,398	0
East Dunbartonshire	1,348	165
East Lothian	884	0
East Renfrewshire	1,338	1,338
Edinburgh, City	4,665	858
Eilean Siar	604	155
Falkirk	1,362	49
Fife	3,199	535
Glasgow City	4,501	203
Highland	2,908	16
Inverclyde	871	114
Midlothian	570	191
Moray	159	14
North Ayrshire	1,311	140
North Lanarkshire	4,033	0
Orkney	241	0
Perth and Kinross	849	220
Renfrewshire	2,213	278
Scottish Borders	945	0
Shetland	471	0
South Ayrshire	1,140	89
South Lanarkshire	2,805	305
Stirling	1,084	25
West Dunbartonshire	901	0
West Lothian	1,390	437
Scotland	52,168	5,658

Notes:

1. The books and equipment figures include expenditure on text and library books and educational tools equipment and materials in local authority nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.
2. Where expenditure on books is shown as £0 it should be assumed that the expenditure is included as equipment.

Table 3: Resources allocated centrally during 1998–99 for school library books

Councils	*£ at outturn prices*
Aberdeen, City	272,697
Aberdeenshire	405,151
Angus	177,643
Argyll and Bute	169,282
Clackmannanshire	75,465
Dumfries and Galloway	257,648
Dundee	205,505
East Ayrshire	191,932
East Dunbartonshire	191,696

Table 3: Resources allocated centrally during 1998–99 for school library books

Councils	*£ at outturn prices*
East Lothian	130,879
East Renfrewshire	152,457
Edinburgh, City	499,605
Eilean Siar	67,934
Falkirk	214,678
Fife	548,241
Glasgow City	791,418
Highland	401,837
Inverclyde	132,050
Midlothian	132,330
Moray	144,451
North Ayrshire	216,597
North Lanarkshire	523,962
Orkney	44,467
Perth and Kinross	201,053
Renfrewshire	268,523
Scottish Borders	169,846
Shetland	55,622
South Ayrshire	175,848
South Lanarkshire	476,873
Stirling	135,812
West Dunbartonshire	156,098
West Lothian	252,597
Scotland	7,840,197

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Opinion Polls

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the issues on which the Government have hired opinion poll organisations to test Scottish public opinion since they came into office; and how much they have spent testing public opinion on each issue. [80052]

Mr. McLeish: The Scottish Office has not undertaken any opinion polls in the period concerned. Information for other government departments and bodies in Scotland could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Focus Groups

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the issues on which the Government have consulted Focus Groups in Scotland since they came into office; and how much they have spent consulting on each issue. [80053]

Mr. McLeish: The Scottish Office has undertaken Focus Groups in the following research studies. The estimated cost of the Focus Groups is given in the table. Information for other government departments and bodies in Scotland could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

		£000
EID	Views of Parents on information required from schools and education authorities	9
D of H	Acute Services Review	15
DD	Public knowledge and perceptions of local government (for the Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament)	5
	Development of Government Public Information Campaign relating to elections to the Scottish Parliament	14
	Public views on the operation of the Scottish Parliament	11
	Review of Practice in Housing Management	5
	Survey of Travellers Views	9
	Evaluation of Rough Sleepers Initiative	6
	The Young Teenager and Road Safety	9

		£000
AEFD	Migration in Rural Scotland	3
	Rural Water Review (Private supplies)	5
HD	Teenwise Alcohol Projects	4
	Hamilton Child Safety Initiative	5
	Violence and Harassment of Gay Men	2
	Joint Statement on Crown Witnesses	11
	Impact and effectiveness of Reporter decision making	39
	Evaluation of the Keep Warm This Winter Campaign	7
	Victims reactions to Victim Information Leaflets	4
	Evaluation of Dundee Family Project	5
	Views from people with learning disabilities and their carers about services	10
	Quality of care and quality of life for people in residential homes	5

New School Building Projects

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the new *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools completed in Scotland since 1 May 1997, indicating the cost of each individual school; [79833]

(2) if he will list the new *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Scotland on which construction has started since 1 May 1997, indicating the expected cost of each school; [79834]

(3) if he will list the new *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Scotland on which the Government expect construction to start during the next three years, indicating their expected starting dates and the expected cost of each school. [79835]

Mrs. Liddell: Detailed information about progress and costs of new school building projects is not held centrally.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Schools (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list capital expenditure in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms on building new (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in Scotland for each year since 1992; [79828]

(2) if he will list in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms the total capital expenditure on school building maintenance in Scotland for each financial year since 1992; and if he will list the amount spent in each Scottish local authority area in each year. [79830]

Mrs. Liddell: The available information is given in the following tables which have been derived from annual returns made by local authorities. Expenditure on capital maintenance and on new buildings is not recorded separately.

Capital expenditure on nursery, primary and secondary schools

£000 at outturn prices

Regional/Islands Councils	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Borders	2,718	1,738	3,051	1,716
Central	5,877	5,714	7,034	11,917
Dumfries and Galloway	3,787	5,066	6,756	4,743
Fife	5,104	7,752	5,862	8,411
Grampian	6,736	9,581	10,855	19,875
Highland	5,119	4,487	3,825	3,761
Lothian	18,011	18,950	18,310	14,849
Strathclyde	29,226	34,435	49,956	44,473
Tayside	5,458	5,775	6,185	6,523
Orkney	1,154	2,092	2,110	1,919
Shetland	4,001	3,657	2,611	1,740
Western Isles	2,499	1,846	1,363	1,627
Scotland	89,690	101,093	117,918	121,554

Capital expenditure on nursery, primary and secondary schools

£000 at 1997–98 prices

Regional/Islands Councils	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Borders	3,077	1,917	3,318	1,813
Central	6,654	6,302	7,648	12,591
Dumfries and Galloway	4,288	5,587	7,346	5,011
Fife	5,779	8,550	6,374	8,887
Grampian	7,626	10,567	11,803	21,000
Highland	5,796	4 949	4,159	3,974
Lothian	20,392	20,900	19,910	15,689
Strathclyde	33,089	37,978	54,320	46,989
Tayside	6,179	6,369	6,725	6,892
Orkney	1,307	2,307	2,294	2,028
Shetland	4,530	4,033	2,839	1,838
Western Isles	2,829	2,036	1,482	1,719
Scotland	101,544	111,494	128,219	128,432

Notes:

1. The figures have been compiled from Capital Payments Returns (CPR5) submitted by local authorities and include gross capital payments both funded and not funded from revenue

2. In addition to expenditure on work on buildings, the figures include expenditure on items such as the acquisition of land, vehicles and plant

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

School Building Maintenance

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will estimate the total amount it would cost in current cash terms, of effecting all school building maintenance outstanding on 1 May 1997 in Scotland, indicating the amount for each Scottish local authority area; [79829]

(2) if he will list the total estimated expenditure on school building maintenance in Scotland in each of the next three years, indicating the amount estimated to be spent by each Scottish local authority in each year. [79831]

Mrs. Liddell: The overall management of their school building stock is a matter for individual authorities. Detailed information of the kind requested is not held centrally.

Capital expenditure on nursery, primary and secondary schools

Councils	1996–97 (at outturn prices)	1996–97 (at 1997–98 prices)	1997–98 (at outturn prices)
Aberdeen, City	4,385	4,495	4,375
Aberdeenshire	5,778	5,922	3,721
Angus	426	437	2,067
Argyll and Bute	2,190	2,245	3,138
Clackmannanshire	252	258	1,119
Dumfries and Galloway	5,990	6,140	6,459
Dundee	3,111	3,189	2,382
East Ayrshire	2,595	2,660	2,654
East Dunbartonshire	2,459	2,520	2,632
East Lothian	6,488	6,650	6,013
East Renfrewshire	677	694	2,737
Edinburgh, City	13,718	14,061	14,444
Eilean Siar	1,905	1,953	1,355
Falkirk	3,725	3,818	2,172
Fife	7,007	7,182	6,199
Glasgow City	12,045	12,346	8,576
Highland	5,159	5,288	6,085
Inverclyde	1,787	1,832	1,994
Midlothian	581	596	516
Moray	2,734	2,802	1,470
North Ayrshire	5,217	5,347	4,424
North Lanarkshire	3,313	3,396	5,314
Orkney	1,502	1,540	1,712
Perth and Kinross	493	505	1,444
Renfrewshire	1,912	1,960	2,396
Scottish Borders	1,007	1,032	1,137
Shetland	1,773	1,817	2,644
South Ayrshire	3,483	3,570	2,861
South Lanarkshire	7,610	7,800	5,847
Stirling	2,136	2,189	1,812
West Dunbartonshire	1,537	1,575	2,522
West Lothian	6,851	7,022	8,578
Scotland	119,846	122,841	120,799

Notes:
1. The figures have been compiled from Capital Payment Returns (CPR 5) submitted by local authorities and include gross capital payments both funded and not funded from revenue.
2. In addition to expenditure on work on buildings, the figures include expenditure on items such as the acquisition of land, vehicles and plant.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Quarantine

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *302–03*, to the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), when he expects to make an announcement on reform of the quarantine laws. [79374]

Mr. Rooker: My right hon. Friend (the Minister) made such an announcement, in the House, on 26 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 649–50.

"Dead Fish Patrol"

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he authorised the appearance of officials on the BBC2 programme "Dead Fish Patrol" on 22 March; and if the views expressed reflect Government policy. [79308]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* We receive many requests from the media to observe and film the activities relating to fisheries enforcement. In the interests of openness, we agree to these requests where we can and did so in this case. The programme was a "fly-on-the-wall" documentary and showed fishermen and enforcement officers going about their business and speaking frankly. Government policy is to enforce the fisheries management rules effectively. This is in the interests of those fishermen who obey the rules. It helps to protect the value of the investment which all fishermen have in the industry and in securing the longer term sustainability of the industry. The remarks by fisheries inspectors recorded in the film demonstrated a high level of commitment to implementing the management rules which is a difficult task, often undertaken in demanding circumstances. Regrettably, the film also showed evidence of how necessary the task is. Fisheries Inspectors do an important job, vital to the running of the fishing industry, and deserve our full support.

Vitamins and Minerals Advisory Group

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will post on his Department's web site the background and other papers which are considered by the ad hoc expert advisory group on vitamins and minerals. [79485]

Mr. Rooker: A web site is currently being developed for the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals. In the meantime, copies of papers released by the Group are available on demand subject, where appropriate, to a small charge to cover the cost of copying and postage.

Genetically Modified Crops

Ms Drown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the National Pollen Research Unit's advice on the minimum advisable separation distance between genetically engineered maize crops and conventional crops. [79500]

Mr. Rooker: The National Pollen Research Unit's recent report provided a review of information regarding the dispersal of pollen and the distance it could travel. The Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) have been asked to consider this report and, when available, their advice will be published and placed in the Libraries of the House.

The risk of cross-pollination, which can be affected by other factors such as pollen viability as well as separation distance, is considered by ACRE when examining each application for release of genetically modified (GM) crops. Appropriate conditions (e.g. separation distances) may be included in a consent, but a consent would not be granted if ACRE considered the risks associated with cross-pollination to be unacceptable. In addition, Government are funding research on the dispersal and viability of pollen of different crop species.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the (1) sites in the United Kingdom where genetically modified crops have been grown in breach of the licence conditions and (2) name

of *(a)* the promoter and *(b)* owner of the (i) trial and (ii) materials in the trial and *(c)* any other (A) body and (B) person responsible for conducting such trials. [72553]

Mr. Rooker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 29 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *457*.

Pig Meat Imports

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what legal advice he has received on whether it would be possible to prevent the importation and sale of pig meat produced in ways that do not conform to United Kingdom animal welfare standards. [78933]

Mr. Morley: My legal advice is quite clear. Neither the Treaty of Rome nor the rules of the World Trade Organisation allow the UK to ban the import or sale of pigmeat that has not been produced to our own welfare standards.

CAP Reform

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the impact of recent CAP reform proposals on farming in Staffordshire. [78340]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 24 March 1999]:* The package of measures provisionally agreed in Brussels recently represents a good deal for farmers across the UK.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the impact of the recent CAP reform proposals on *(a)* farming in Herefordshire and *(b)* potato cultivation. [78496]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 26 March 1999]:* The package of measures agreed at the European Council on 24–25 March represent real reform to the Common Agricultural Policy which UK farmers will benefit from.

There is currently no CAP regime for potato production and the agreement therefore has no direct implications for potato cultivation.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons reform of the sugar and the sheepmeat regimes was not included by the Council or the Commission in the latest CAP reform package. [79778]

Mr. Rooker: It is regrettable that the Commission did not include proposals for reform of the sugar and sheepmeat regimes within the CAP reform package. The Commission put forward proposals for the main commodities in structural surplus on the EU market, i.e. cereals, beef and dairy, which it considered were most under threat from market developments; namely enlargement and the present and likely future commitments to the WTO.

During the negotiations the UK pressed for the sugar and sheepmeat regimes to be included in the package, and it continues to press for early reform. In the case of sugar the Commission are required to present proposals before the end of 2000. We believe that the case for early reform of the sheepmeat regime will be strengthened as a result of budgetary pressures arising from the knock-on effects of reforms agreed for the arable and beef sectors.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the annual cost to individual businesses of the proposed Food Standards Agency, indicating the level at which the levy will be set. [79244]

Mr. Rooker: We have recently consulted on proposals for a levy of £90 per year on food retail and catering premises that are required to register with the local authority under the Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991. The money raised would fund the new costs of setting up and operating the Agency. The Agency's other costs will be met from existing food safety and standards budgets and related cost recovery schemes.

Public consultation on the levy proposals ended on 24 March, and we are now considering carefully the responses we received.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the possible liability of Women's Institute markets for the levy included in his proposals for the Food Standards Agency; and if he will make a statement. [79613]

Mr. Rooker: Under the proposals, published for public consultation on 27 January, the levy in connection with the Food Standards Agency would apply to food retail and catering premises registered under the Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991. Women's Institute markets, like other retail outlets, are required to register if held on five or more days in any five week period. Individual producers preparing food for sale from stalls run by WI Country Markets Ltd. are not themselves required to register, and are therefore outside the scope of the levy proposals.

Consultation on the levy proposals closed on 24 March. We are considering the comments we received before deciding how to proceed.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughterhouses and cutting plants were operating in the United Kingdom in the categories *(a)* full throughput red slaughterhouses, *(b)* low throughput red slaughterhouses, *(c)* full throughput white slaughterhouses, *(d)* low throughput white slaughterhouses, *(e)* full throughput cutting plants and *(f)* low throughput cutting plants in (i) December 1995, (ii) December 1996, (iii) December 1997 and (iv) December 1998; and what was the average throughput for each category in each year. [79081]

Mr. Rooker: The tables give the figures of licensed EC approved and low throughput slaughterhouses and cutting premises (red meat and poultry meat) operating in the United Kingdom as at 31 December 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998, respectively. Details of licensed UK meat premises are published in the Meat Hygiene Enforcement Report, which is placed in the Library of the House each month. We are seeking to provide average throughput figures for each category and I hope to place them in the Library of the House immediately after Easter.

	EC approved	Low throughput
Slaughterhouses—fresh meat		
1995	295	208
1996	272	212
1997	267	200
1998	263	189
Slaughterhouses—poultrymeat, farmed game bird meat and rabbit meat		
1995	112	67
1996	113	71
1997	105	65
1998	104	67
Cutting premises—fresh meat		
1995	328	146
1996	308	150
1997	293	145
1998	283	146
Cutting premises—poultry meat, farmed game bird meat and rabbit meat		
1995	54	24
1996	58	30
1997	64	35
1998	73	46

Guide Dogs (Quarantine)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has made in enabling blind ex-servicemen to be accompanied on visits to France by their guide dogs without those dogs having to be held in quarantine on their return to the UK. [79042]

Mr. Rooker: Guide dogs, like all domestic dogs are currently subject to six months quarantine. On 26 March 1999, *Official Report,* columns 649–50, my right hon. Friend the Minister announced to the House that, in the light of the Kennedy Group's analysis, it is desirable to move as quickly as possible to a system under which dogs and cats coming from European Union and certain other European countries and rabies-free islands could enter the UK without quarantine. Our objective is to bring the new arrangements into operation throughout the United Kingdom by April 2001. We also plan to launch a pilot scheme—or pilot schemes—within the next twelve months. As soon as the specific arrangements for these schemes have been established, these will be reported to the House.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make an immediate derogation from the quarantine regulations to enable Mr. T. J. Ireland, Ty Croes, Garwdol Benmaen, Gwynedd to attend the commemoration of the Normandy Landings with his guide dog, without the dog having to be held in quarantine on his return. [79043]

Mr. Nick Brown: I have a great deal of sympathy for Mr. Ireland. If his dog met the requirements of the new arrangements I announced on 26 March, it could be exempted from quarantine when those new arrangements are in effect. However, I cannot agree to an exemption now for the reasons set out in my letter to the right hon. Member of 1 April.

Dairy Industry

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many meetings he has had in the last three months with *(a)* the President of the Dairy Industry Federation and *(b)* the Chairman of Milk Marque; and what plans he has to meet further with either. [79161]

Mr. Rooker: None.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what controls exist in respect of the sale of dairy products of US origin where bovine somatotropin may have been used in their production. [78983]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* All cows' milk contains small quantities of naturally occurring bovine somatotropin (BST), the manufactured form of BST (rBST) is not permitted for use in the EU. rBST is almost indistinguishable from naturally occurring BST and it is not practicable to establish through testing whether BST is present because of administration of rBST to the animal. Although rBST is permitted in the USA, the country of origin is normally given on most food labels or a manufacturer's address is given.

Ragwort

Mr. Cunliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take to encourage local authorities to combat the ragwort weed. [78814]

Mr. Morley: Ragwort is an injurious weed under the provisions of the Weeds Act 1959. That Act permits the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, rather than local authorities, to serve notice on any occupier of land to control injurious weeds from spreading. Where resources permit, local authorities can themselves play a positive part in eradication, for example, by active weed control alongside rural roads and on any other land which they own.

Beam Trawlers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce the next decommissioning scheme for beam trawlers; and by how many boats he intends to reduce the fleet. [80431]

Mr. Morley: I have no plans to introduce a decommissioning scheme for beam trawlers. UK targets for this fleet segment under the EU's Multi-Annual Guidance Programme (MAGP IV) are currently being addressed by the arrangements for managing fishing effort which I announced on 24 February 1998, *Official Report,* columns *187–88.*

Food Advisory Committee

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the declared outside interests of the members of the Food Advisory Committee. [80630]

Mr. Rooker: The declared interests of the members of the Food Advisory Committee are published in the Committee's Annual Report, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those members or advisers to the Food Advisory Committee who are involved currently with the European Commission Scientific Committee on foods in its work with vitamin and mineral supplements. [80221]

Mr. Rooker: None of the members of the Food Advisory Committee is involved with this work.

Genetically Modified Food Substances

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 29 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *507*, on genetically modified food substances, what steps are being recommended by his Department to establishments selling prepared food, who are required to disclose items containing genetically modified ingredients. [80050]

Mr. Rooker: Those establishments selling prepared foods will need to ask their suppliers about which of the ingredients they are using contain genetically modified material.

Fisheries Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 30 March; and if he will make a statement. [79883]

Mr. Morley: I, together with my noble Friend Lord Sewel, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, represented the UK. The Council adopted the Autonomous Tariff Quotas covering imports at reduced tariffs of fisheries products required by the processing industry in 1999. Ireland and Italy voted against. It had a first debate on Commission proposals implementing in the fisheries sector the reform of the EU structural funds. This revealed a wide range of views. The Commission presented its proposals on reform of the marketing regime and on the listing of serious infringements. The Presidency is aiming to reach agreement on these three regulations at the Fisheries Council on 10 June.

I raised the need for the Commission to make early progress, taking account of forthcoming scientific advice, on measures to conserve sandeel stocks for seabirds which are dependent on them, particularly during the breeding season. I also pressed the Commission to bring forward its promised proposals on the allocation of the new Total Allowable Catches for spurdog and for Northern Shrimp and the existing Total Allowable Catch for blue whiting.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the cost to each fisherman of installing satellite surveillance equipment on over 24 metre vessels; and what plans he has to provide grants towards their costs. [80432]

Mr. Morley: The cost of installing new satellite monitoring equipment is likely to range from £3,000 to £8,000 depending on functionality and compliance with Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) requirements. Some vessels may already carry equipment that can be adapted at a lower cost. Following the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government announced on 3 August last year that vessels subject to satellite monitoring would not receive Government assistance for their equipment.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the costs to *(a)* his Department of inspecting and *(b)* fishermen of filling in a logsheet and landing declaration. [80430]

Mr. Morley: Information on the costs of inspecting logsheets is not readily available since such inspections form part of the wider enforcement duties undertaken by the Ministry's Sea Fisheries Inspectorate and the Royal Navy's Fishery Protection Squadron.

EU logsheets on fishing activity have to be brought up to date at least once every 24 hours and this should not entail any additional cost whilst the vessel is at sea. The average cost of submitting a logsheet at the end of a fishing trip is estimated at £2.80 and that for completing and submitting a landing declaration at £4.20 per trip.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the cost of an inspection by his Department of a fishing vessel *(a)* in port and *(b)* at sea. [80429]

Mr. Morley: The Ministry's Sea Fisheries Inspectorate undertake a wide range of enforcement and other duties, including inspections of fishing vessels in port. In 1998, the direct cost of running the SFI was some £3 million and in that period it undertook some 4,271 inspections of fishing vessels in port.

Inspections at sea are undertaken by the Royal Navy's Fishery Protection Squadron on behalf of the Ministry. In 1998, the Squadron provided 1,081 patrol days at a cost of some £6 million and during that period undertook 1,828 inspections.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79656]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*. The requirements of the Ministerial Code also apply to Parliamentary Private Secretaries when attending meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79622]

Mr. Morley: Environmental appraisals are not usually carried out in isolation from the general process of reviewing policies. The Ministry seeks to take into account all important factors, including environmental ones, in the formulation of policy and its implementation. Thus, there is a considerable input into monitoring the environmental

impacts of policies, particularly where policy objectives are environmental in nature. As part of its regular policy review process, the Ministry carries out a rolling programme of economic policy evaluations. A number of these evaluations have been of agri-environment schemes or other policies with a significant environmental dimension. The evaluation programme is published on the MAFF website *(http://www.maff.gov.uk/r&d/economic.htm)*, with details of previous research and of policies which are due to be evaluated in the coming year. A copy has also been placed in the library of the House.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the organisations and companies which have made representations about the Meat Hygiene Service's charging regime due to be introduced on 1 April 1999; [79439]

(2) what further consultations are taking place on the Meat Hygiene Services charging regime, due to be introduced on 1 April 1999, with special reference to low throughput abattoirs; and if he will make a statement. [79440]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 31 March 1999]:* The level of Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) charges to apply in 1999–2000 for hygiene/welfare inspection and for the enforcement of Specified Risk Material controls has yet to be decided. Ministers are still carefully considering proposals made by the MHS to ensure they are fully cost justified. They will then be subject to full consultation with all plant operators. The results of that consultation will be reported back to Ministers who will then take final decisions on the level of rates to apply and their operative date.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) where his predecessor, as minister, stayed on his visit to Strasbourg in July 1997; what was the cost of that accommodation; and what expenses he incurred during that visit; [75864]

(2) if he will list where ministers in his Department have stayed on their visits to Strasbourg and the costs of each of those stays since 1 May 1997. [75865]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Ministers in this Department have made 3 overnight visits to Strasbourg since 1 May 1997, two by my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and once by me in October 1998. The details are as set out in the table. All travel was judged to comply with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Date	*Purpose of visit*	*Hotel*
15–16 July 1997	Appearance before the European Parliament's Temporary Committee of Inquiry on BSE	Strasbourg Hilton. Cost—£115.70
15–16 June 1998	Appearance before the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture as President in Office of the Council and bilateral with Commissioner Fischler	Strasbourg Hilton. Cost—£106
20–22 October 1998	Minister's visit to the European Parliament and meetings with MEPs	Strasbourg Hilton. Cost—£248

Civil Servants (Appraisal)

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the appraisal performance markings awarded to civil servants in 1998 for *(a)* each agency in his Department and *(b)* the Department broken down by (i) grade, (ii) gender, (iii) ethnicity, (iv) part-time/full-time working and (v) disability; and for (1) each agency and (2) the Department whether the Cabinet Office's four fifths rule for detecting potential adverse impact was applied to the appraisal markings of civil servants in the 1998 report round. [78142]

Mr. Morley: The breakdown of 1998 overall performance markings for staff in MAFF including those agencies that use the core-Department's Human Resource computer system is as set out.

My officials are considering current data, along with historic data, for any indications of possible adverse impact.

I have asked the Chief Executives of those agencies who have their own HR computer systems to write to my hon. Friend separately.

Breakdown of 1998 overall performance markings

	Box 1	*Box 2*	*Box 3A*	*Box 3B*	*Box 4*	*Box 5*
MAFF						
Grade						
AA	24	395	315	101	0	0
AO	42	777	615	158	9	0
EO	28	616	421	69	4	0
HEO	38	463	213	33	1	0
SEO	23	296	150	12	3	0
Grade 7	21	159	56	7	0	0
Grade 6	7	47	24	1	0	0
SCS	5	35	15	0	0	0
Sex						
Female	100	1,400	880	155	5	0
Male	88	1,388	929	226	12	0
Ethnic Group						
Minority	5	130	117	39	1	0
Unknown	8	94	52	15	1	0
White	175	2,564	1,640	327	15	0
Part-time						
Full time	164	2,506	1,603	354	17	0
Part time	24	282	206	27	0	0
Disability						
No disability	181	2,596	1,674	331	14	0
Disability	7	192	135	50	3	0
Pesticides Safety Directorate						
Grade						
AA	0	3	6	0	0	0
AO	2	15	1	3	0	0
EO	3	13	12	2	0	0
HEO	9	34	11	1	0	0
SEO	3	21	4	0	1	0
Grade 7	2	10	2	0	0	0
Grade 6	*	*	*	*	*	*
SCS	*	*	*	*	*	*

Breakdown of 1998 overall performance markings

	Box 1	Box 2	Box 3A	Box 3B	Box 4	Box 5
Sex						
Female	10	43	16	1	1	0
Male	9	55	20	5	0	0
Ethnic Group						
Minority	*	*	*	*	*	*
Unknown	*	*	*	*	*	*
White	19	94	36	5	1	0
Part time						
Full time	16	88	33	6	1	0
Part time	3	10	3	0	0	0
Disability						
No disability	17	85	30	5	0	0
Disability	2	13	6	1	1	0
Veterinary Laboratories Agency						
Grade						
AA	16	110	81	17	1	0
AO	19	168	111	26	5	0
EO	6	80	51	13	1	0
HEO	1	48	23	3	2	0
SEO	6	32	11	1	0	0
Grade 7	7	60	30	6	0	0
Grade 6	0	6	4	1	0	0
SCS	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sex						
Female	28	277	164	36	2	0
Male	27	228	147	31	7	0
Ethnic Group						
Minority	0	9	5	4	2	0
Unknown	1	16	6	3	0	0
White	54	480	300	60	7	0
Part Time						
Full time	51	445	280	58	9	0
Part time	4	60	31	9	0	0
Disability						
No Disability	52	477	289	62	8	0
Disability	3	28	22	5	1	0
Veterinary Medicines Directorate						
Grade						
AA	0	7	3	2	0	0
AO	2	14	5	1	0	0
EO	1	8	3	0	0	0
HEO	1	3	2	2	0	0
SEO	1	7	1	1	0	0
Grade 7	0	14	7	1	0	0
Grade 6	*	*	*	*	*	*
SCS	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sex						
Female	4	35	11	4	0	0
Male	1	21	13	3	0	0
Ethnic Group						
Minority	*	*	*	*	*	*
Unknown	*	*	*	*	*	*
White	*	*	*	*	*	*
Part Time						
Full time	5	51	21	6	0	0
Part time	0	5	3	1	0	0
Disability						
No Disability	*	*	*	*	*	*
Disability	*	*	*	*	*	*

Notes:

1. Data have not been provided in any group where there are less than 5 reports in total or where totals of less than 5 could be ascertained to ensure that individual anonymity is protected. Such entries have been marked with an asterisk.
2. Data in the 'disability' group comprise staff who have declared a disability. Those in the 'no disability' group comprise all others.
3. The definitions of the overall box markings for staff in grades AA-Grade 6 are as follows:
Box 1 Outstanding
Box 2 Performance significantly above requirements
Box 3a Performance fully effective in all respects
Box 3b Performance sufficient for the needs of the job
Box 4 Improvements to performance required in some respects
Box 5 Unsatisfactory
4. Staff in the Senior Civil Service also have 2+ and 3+ but no 3b markings. The 2+ data have been included with the Box 2 data and the 3+ data with the Box 3a data.
5. Data cover all reports with a 1998 report date and entered onto the computer system by 19 March 1999. Some of the 1998 reports will not yet be on the system and as such the data will be incomplete.
6. Data include leavers.

Letter from Johnston McNeill to Mr. John McDonnell, dated March 1999:

As Chief Executive of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food requesting information on the appraisal performance markings awarded to civil servants in 1998 broken by down (i) grade, (ii) gender, (iii) ethnicity, (iv) part-time/full-time working and (v) disability and whether the Cabinet Office's four fifths rule for detecting potential adverse impact was applied to the appraisal markings of civil servants in the 1998 report round, has been passed to me to reply as regards this Executive Agency.

The breakdown of the 1998 overall performance markings for staff in the MHS is attached. The MHS is considering the data for any indications of possible adverse impact.

Breakdown of MHS performance markings

	Box 1	Box 2	Box 3	Box 4	Box 5
MHS					
Grade					
TMHI	1	21	14	4	0
MTEC	4	72	92	11	3
PMI	2	60	24	2	1
MHI	16	363	302	27	3
SPMI	1	18	2	0	0
SMHI	6	87	40	2	0
OVS	0	6	7	0	0
Sex					
Female	2	36	28	1	0
Male	28	591	453	45	7
Ethnic Group					
Minority	0	2	11	2	0
Unknown	0	4	1	2	0
White	30	621	469	42	7
Commitment					
Full time	30	608	462	46	7
Part time	0	19	19	0	0
Disability					
No Disability	0	0	0	0	0
Disability	0	1	2	0	0

Note:
Figures measured over 1,191 employees.
Abbreviations
TMHI Trainee Meat Hygiene Inspector
MTEC Meat Technician
PMI Poultry Meat Inspector
MHI Meat Hygiene Inspector
SPMI Senior Poultry Meat Inspector
SMHI Senior Meat Hygiene Inspector
OVS Official Veterinary Surgeon

Letter from P. I. Stanley to Mr. John McDonnell, dated March 1999:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), to your question concerning appraisal performance markings awarded to staff in 1998.

The breakdown of 1998 overall performance markings for staff in CSL is set out on the attached sheet.

My staff are considering current data, along with historic data, for any indications of possible adverse impact.

Breakdown of 1998 performance markings

	Box 1	*Box 2*	*Box 3a*	*Box 3b*	*Box 4*	*Box 5*
Central Science Laboratory						
Grade						
Level 1	5	64	52	9	0	0
Level 2	8	123	107	19	3	0
Level 3	2	38	17	4	0	0
Level 4	3	16	10	2	1	0
Level 5	2	12	2	1	0	0
Gender						
Male	11	137	112	23	3	0
Female	9	116	76	12	1	0
Ethnicity						
Minorities	Information not available					
Unknown						
Part/Full-time						
Part-time	1	15	11	3	0	0
Full-time	19	238	177	32	4	0
Disability						
Disability	0	2	2	0	1	0
No Disability	20	251	186	35	3	0

Notes:

1. A breakdown by box markings is not presently available in terms of ethnicity.
2. The definitions of the overall box markings are as follows:

Box 1 Outstanding

Box 2 Performance significantly above requirements

Box 3a Performance fully effective in all respects

Box 3b Performance sufficient for the needs of the job

Box 4 Improvements to performance required in some respects

Box 5 Unsatisfactory

3. Data covers all reports with a 1998 report date.
4. Data includes leavers.
5. Staff in the Senior Civil Service are included in the MAFF breakdown of 1998 overall performance markings.

Letter from Sarah Nason to Mr. John McDonnell, dated 23 March 1999:

The Minister has asked me to respond, in respect of the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA), to your question about performance appraisal markings awarded to civil servants in 1998 for his Department and each agency in his Department, broken down by grade; gender; ethnicity; part-time/full-time working and disability; and whether the Cabinet Office's four-fifths rule for detecting potential adverse impact was applied to the appraisal markings of civil servants in the 1998 report round.

I enclose a breakdown as requested of performance markings from the 1997–98 reporting year for staff in FRCA. FRCA staff are in different grades to those in the core department, but for your ease of reference we have converted the grade data to the nearest MAFF equivalents.

Work is in hand to analyse this data for any indications of possible adverse impact.

Breakdown of overall performance markings in FRCA: 1997–98 reporting year

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Ethnicity					
White Origin	21	198	112	1	0
Ethnic minority origin	0	2	0	0	0
Unknown	10	73	65	1	0
Disability					
None or none known	31	271	176	2	0
Disability known	0	2	1	0	0
Full or part time					
Full time	29	247	152	2	0
Part time	2	26	25	0	0
Gender					
Male	16	177	100	2	0
Female	15	96	77	0	0
Grade and equivalents					
AA	0	1	0	0	0
AO	7	55	37	0	0
EO	10	27	9	0	0
HEO	4	77	90	2	0
SEO	8	76	31	0	0
G7	2	30	10	0	0
G6	0	7	0	0	0
Senior Civil Service	*	*	*	*	*

Notes:

* Data not provided as this would enable individuals' report markings to be ascertained.

Definitions of overall performance markings are as follows:

Box 1—Outstanding

Box 2—Very Good

Box 3—Satisfactory

Box 4—Improvement Necessary

Box 5—Unsatisfactory

Data covering 1997–98 reports input onto the Agency's computerised Human Resources System by 15 March 1999.

Data do not include leavers.

Letter from P. W. Greig-Smith to Mr. John McDonnell, dated March 1999:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and food has asked me to reply to your question on appraisal performance markings in 1998. I am replying on behalf of the Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS).

The breakdown of overall performance markings for staff in CEFAS is set out overleaf.

	1	*2*	*3A*	*3B*	*Total*
Current grade/overall assessment					
6	1	8	6	0	15
7	1	20	7	0	28
AA	4	3	3	3	13
AO	11	41	8	2	62
EO	13	47	17	4	81
HEO	9	31	18	0	58
Industrial	8	18	6	0	32
SCS	—	—	1	—	1
SEO	2	28	8	0	38
Total	47	168	66	9	328
Sex/overall assessment					
F	18	72	19	5	114
M	31	124	55	4	214
Total	49	196	74	9	328

	1	2	3A	3B	Total
Full/part time/overall assessment					
Full	46	172	70	7	295
Part	3	24	4	2	33
Total	49	196	74	9	328
Ethnic origin/overall assessment					
White	47	188	69	9	313
Ethnic Minority	—	3	—	—	3
Unknown	2	5	5	0	12
	49	196	74	9	328
Able bodied/ Overall assessment					
Disabled	2	13	6	—	21
Able Bodied	47	183	68	9	307
Total	49	196	74	9	328

AgrEvo

Ms Drown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the company AgrEvo has a marketing consent to grow genetically modified crops in the UK. [79501]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

AgrEvo (France) has one such consent under Council Directive 90/220/EEC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms. This consent is for a maize modified for tolerance to glufosinate ammonium herbicide. The consent is for agricultural use leading to animal and human consumption and was issued by the French authorities on 3 August 1998.

Illegal Fishing

Dr. Godman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many skippers of fishing vessels have been convicted in the sheriff courts for offences relating to illegal fishing activities in each of the past three years; what was the average financial penalty imposed; if he will list the nationality of the (i) skippers and (ii) vessels; if the gear and catch were confiscated in all cases; and if he will make a statement. [78403]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* I have been asked to reply.

Substantial resources are devoted to fisheries enforcement and appropriate action is taken where infringements are detected. Information about fisheries prosecutions which have been dealt with in sheriff courts in the past 3 years is set out in the table.

	Number of skippers successfully prosecuted for one or more infringements[1]	*Average financial penalty imposed*[2] *(£)*
1996	62	4,013
1997	87	4,355
1998	73	2,600

[1] Includes skippers who are also owners
[2] Calculated as the total value of penalties imposed (fines and any financial penalties to the value of the catch and/or gear (as appropriate)) divided by the number of skippers prosecuted

	1996		*1997*		*1998*	
	Skipper	*Vessel*	*Skipper*	*Vessel*	*Skipper*	*Vessel*
Nationality of skippers and vessels						
UK	55	57	82	83	71	69
Danish	2	2	1	1	1	1
Spanish	2	—	1	1	—	—
Faeroese	1	1	—	—	—	—
Dutch	1	1	—	—	—	—
Irish	1	1	—	—	1	1
German	—	—	2	2	—	—
Belgian	—	—	1	1	—	—
Number of cases where gear and/or catch were confiscated						
Gear	4		2		1	
Catch	3		2		1	

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 14 April 1999

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ILO/WTO

8. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make it her policy to support the creation of a joint working party between the ILO and WTO to examine relevant issues. [79110]

Clare Short: The Government are working for the world-wide observance of core labour standards for all workers. We believe that the right way to do this is through the ILO and that the recent ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work presents a key opportunity for progress. Developing countries—who make up nearly three quarters of WTO members—are opposed to the formal introduction of labour issues to the WTO agenda. They are concerned that labour standards would be used for protectionist trade purposes. We do not therefore believe the creation of a joint working party between the ILO and WTO to discuss labour issues is the right way forward, but we do support more systematic reporting between the two secretariats.

Sierra Leone

9. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what Her Majesty's Government's plans are for humanitarian relief in Sierra Leone. [79111]

Mr. Foulkes: We have been leading the international effort to provide humanitarian relief and improve the security situation in Sierra Leone.

We are co-ordinating closely with the EC, other donors and the UN to maximise effectiveness and encourage the burden sharing.

We are also restarting longer term development programmes such as demobilisation of fighters, support to the reform of the police force and security forces, support for independent media and the peace process.

13. **Mr. Wells:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on aid given to the Government of Sierra Leone in the past two years. [79116]

Clare Short: We provided £10.5 million in 1996–97 financial year, £3.4 million in 1997–98 financial year and £9.7 million in 1998–99.

We have provided humanitarian assistance and support for demobilisation, reform of the judiciary and legal systems, the independent media, and reform of the police and security force.

Balkan Refugees

10. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the assistance her Department is providing for refugees in the Balkans. [79112]

Clare Short: We have been one of the largest and most active donors in helping improve the provision of humanitarian relief to the refugees from Kosovo. We have supported NATO in erecting camps, international agencies in bringing people and resources to the region—so far we have provided 23 flights and we have teams working in Tirana airport and supporting the Albanian Government. We are now preparing for the hand-over of camps to UNHCR and the NGOs and are helping establish two refugee centres in Albania.

Our greatest concern is the situation of displaced people in Kosovo. We are considering all possibilities of providing support but no option is easy—in the face of deliberate Serbian repression. Milosevic will have to answer for this to the International Criminal Tribunal.

Education

11. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the IMF and World bank representatives about reforming policies and programmes to protect access to basic education. [79114]

Clare Short: We made clear in our White Paper in November 1997 that we are strongly committed to the implementation of the international development targets which include universal primary education by 2015. We have worked consistently to encourage the World Bank and IMF to incorporate the targets in their programmes.

In recent discussions with the Managing Director of the IMF and the President of the World Bank, I have underlined the importance of protecting spending on health, and education for the poor.

Aid Conditions

14. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the linkage of good government criteria to the provision of aid by her Department. [79117]

Clare Short: As the White Paper on International Development makes clear, good governance is essential to the economic and social policies which are necessary to the reduction of poverty. Our country strategies—20 of which have been published so far—apply this to all our programmes.

Caribbean

15. **Mr. Lock:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the need for development aid in the Caribbean if the banana crop in that region is priced out of international markets; and if she will make a statement. [79118]

Clare Short: Substantial amounts of development assistance are already being made available through the European Commission to improve the competitiveness of the Caribbean banana producers and to support economic diversification programmes for those high cost growers

who are having to leave the industry. We are urgently examining, in consultation with the Caribbean, the implications of the recent WTO rulings. We believe the WTO ruling is compatible with new arrangements that will provide the Caribbean banana industry with viable access to international markets.

EU Development Aid

16. **Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on EU development aid policy. [79119]

17. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU in connection with third world aid. [79120]

18. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made towards improving the management of EU development aid; and if she will make a statement. [79121]

Clare Short: Our contributions to the EC's external assistance programmes absorb approximately 30 per cent. of the Department for International Development's budget.

In December 1998 we published our 18 point strategy to improve EC development spending. This reflects our concern that EC aid spending is both skewed against the poorest countries and often of poor quality. Our strategy includes a proposal for the agreement of a coherent overarching statement of EU development policy.

We are pursuing vigorously our strategy with the Commission and with other EC member states. I agreed a Joint Declaration on improving the EC's contribution to international development with my French and German opposite numbers in February. I expect to discuss specific measures for improving the quality of the EC's development spending at the EU Development Council in May, in the context of the follow-up to recently completed evaluations of the EC's development programmes.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the resignation of the Commissioners of the European Union on the co-ordination of British development aid with that of the EU. [79113]

Clare Short: The events surrounding the resignation of the Commission provide a major opportunity to reform the EC's external assistance programmes. We need an overhaul of approval, auditing and financial management systems, and more accountability. We also need to avoid sanctioning EC programmes or budget levels which cannot be effectively managed. Strengthening co-ordination is a priority of the German EU Presidency and we will support all sensible proposals at the EU Development Council next month.

Inter-American Development Bank

19. **Ms McCafferty:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the extent which the work of the Inter-American Development bank is focused on the relief of poverty. [79122]

Clare Short: Since May 1997, we have been working to increase the poverty focus of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The Bank recognises that poverty remains a persistent problem in Latin America, which is the most unequal region in the world. In February, I co-chaired with IDB's President Iglesias a seminar which took as its starting point the Bank's recent Report entitled "Facing up to Inequality in Latin America". We welcome this as a contribution to raising awareness.

In 1997, the IDB adopted a poverty reduction strategy that charts a broad course for attacking poverty in the region. This calls for the promotion of sustainable and labour-intensive economic growth, investments in human capital and special efforts to reach those groups which are unlikely to benefit from economic growth. Recognising that poverty in the region is principally a rural phenomenon, the Bank adopted a rural poverty reduction strategy in 1998 which emphasises the need to develop national rural poverty reduction strategies, and calls for activities that stimulate participation of beneficiaries including access to land and credit for farmers with productive potential, and non-agricultural employment in micro-enterprises for other rural inhabitants.

During 1998, the Bank approved $3.3 billion for social sector and poverty reduction projects, which represented about 46 per cent. of the year's lending (the highest level ever achieved by the Bank) or 53 per cent. of the total number of projects approved. We believe that the Bank has made a good effort, but that more could be done, particularly on the link between poverty and ethnicity. We are also urging the Bank to commit itself to the International Development Goals on the elimination of poverty.

Micro-Credit Scheme

20. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department plans to give to the development of the world micro-credit scheme. [79123]

Clare Short: We are constantly expanding its support for microfinance institutions targeting some of the world's poorest communities who have no access to formal financial services. Our current commitments for ongoing and planned project activities in this sector amount to £75 million.

India

21. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her recent visit to India. [79124]

Clare Short: I visited India from 22 to 27 March. India is of critical importance in achieving international targets for poverty elimination since 1 in 3 of the poor of the world live there. I agreed with the Indian Government a new country strategy which will soon be published and will focus DFID assistance in a few states which are committed to implementing essential reforms for poverty elimination. These include Orissa and Andhra Pradesh which I visited to discuss how to strengthen our development partnerships with them.

The visit reinforced my view that India has the potential to make much more rapid progress in eliminating poverty. I confirmed Britain's commitment to support Indian partners who share that objective.

Zimbabwe

22. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on aid to Zimbabwe. [79125]

Clare Short: Our Country Strategy Paper for Zimbabwe will be published shortly. The strategy will focus on reducing poverty in Zimbabwe which is increasing because of economic mismanagement and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Copies of the Zimbabwe paper, like all our country strategies, will be placed in the Library of the House.

UNESCO

23. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the future of the UK's involvement in UNESCO. [79126]

Clare Short: We are playing an active role in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). My Department is working to encourage UNESCO to contribute to the international goals for poverty eradication. The Government have published proposals for the design and establishment of a UK Commission for UNESCO.

World Trade Organisation

24. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is her policy in respect of the current WTO regime as it affects developing countries. [79127]

Clare Short: The WTO provides a forum for all countries to participate in a global trading system which is rules based and which operates in an open and transparent way. All decisions are taken by consensus. This is particularly important for developing countries, who are sometimes at a disadvantage in negotiations with the developed world. My Department is working to strengthen the capacity of developing countries so that they can participate effectively in the existing system and in future negotiations. A copy of a recent speech in which I outlined our thinking on developing countries and the WTO will be sent to the hon. Gentleman. I will also place a copy in the Library of the House.

Education (Females)

25. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to link development aid to the provision of education to girls and women. [79128]

Clare Short: We made clear in our White Paper in November 1997 that we are strongly committed to the international goals of universal primary education by 2015 and gender equity in primary and secondary education by 2005.

In our bilateral programme we are supporting Governments that give priority to the education of girls and women. We have committed over £200 million to basic education in a number of countries including Ghana, India, Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh and our largest ever single education commitment of £67 million for Uganda.

We are also working in the multilateral agencies to increase the commitment to girls' and women's education.

These and new programmes being developed reflect strong international evidence that investment in the education of girls is the single most effective way to reduce poverty.

Debt Relief

26. **Mr. Gordon Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is her Department's assessment of the amount of debt cancellation for indebted poor countries that is required in order for the Government to meet their poverty reduction targets for 2015. [79129]

Clare Short: It is impossible to calculate an amount of debt relief needed to meet the International Poverty eradication targets. The reduction of debt for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs), with good policy performance and a commitment to reduce poverty, does however have a crucial part to play in the achievement of the international development goals. A review of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative is currently underway, and we are pressing for a link between debt relief and poverty reduction. In particular, the review needs to assess whether the amount and timing of the debt relief being provided is freeing up sufficient resources to allow governments to tackle poverty effectively. This has to be done on a country-by-country basis.

Departmental Expenditure

27. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if it is her policy to maintain the current balance of expenditure on *(a)* direct bilateral aid, *(b)* aid in the EU, *(c)* contributions to United Nations agencies and *(d)* aid for voluntary organisations. [79130]

Clare Short: In our 1999 Departmental Report we published detailed current and planned figures for all areas of development assistance. Actual expenditure will and should vary reflecting changes, for example, in a country's commitment to poverty reduction.

A copy of the 1999 Departmental Report is available in the Library of this House.

Security Sector Reform

28. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to support security sector reform in developing countries. [79131]

Clare Short: On 9 March, I announced my Department's new plans to help developing countries reform their security sectors. The security sector consists of those who are responsible, or should be responsible, for protecting the state and communities within the state. Included in the security sector are military, paramilitary

and intelligence services, as well as those civilian structures responsible for oversight and control of the security forces.

All countries have legitimate security needs. But a major obstacle to making progress in development and reducing poverty in many countries is the existence of bloated, secretive, repressive, undemocratic and badly structured security sectors. Reforming the security sector is therefore a priority. Eliminating violence and reducing insecurity is a precondition for development.

I outlined seven priority areas for future action which focus on the issues of good governance, conflict prevention, human rights promotion and post-conflict reconstruction. The priority areas are:

- to integrate a security sector reform perspective into country aid programmes, and into the thinking of other donors and multilateral development institutions
- to secure partnership programmes with the United Nations and with regional organisations who wish to co-operate with us on conflict and security issues
- to expand the provision of human rights training for members of the military
- to work internationally to reduce the number of children involved in wars
- to reduce the proliferation of small arms and light weapons
- to discourage excessive and inappropriate military expenditure
- to help to build up the peacekeeping and peace support capacity of developing countries.

Within these priority areas, we plan to provide assistance to strengthen the democratic accountability and transparency of the security sector and facilitate the transition to peace; and second, to strengthen capacities of the uniformed security services, for example through training in conflict prevention and reduction. In doing this, we will work in co-operation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, but it is essential that authorities in developing countries both want our help and are committed to strengthening their effective control over their security sectors.

A copy of my speech and of our "Policy Statement on Poverty and the Security Sector" is available in the Library of the House.

Primary Education

29. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to achieve the target of universal primary education by 2015. [79132]

Clare Short: One of my key international poverty eradication targets is to secure primary education for all children in the world by 2015. Education is therefore of crucial importance in the work of my Department. We are working in the multilateral system to increase its commitment to the 2015 target. In the Government's first year in office (1997–98), we spent over £13 million of bilateral funds on primary education. This was an increase of £5 million over the previous year. Subsequent major commitments have been made of over £200 million to basic education in a number of countries including Ghana, India, Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh and our largest ever single education commitment of £67 million for Uganda. These and new programmes being developed reflect a major contribution to the challenge of achieving universal primary education and will substantially increase the proportion of our bilateral assistance invested in primary education.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department is giving to developing countries to achieve universal primary education. [79115]

Clare Short: We made clear in our White Paper in November 1997 that we are strongly committed to the international development targets which include universal primary education by 2015. We are working to increase international commitment to meet the target. In our own programmes, we spent over £13 million of bilateral funds on primary education in 1997–98. This was an increase of £5 million over the previous year. Subsequent commitments of over £200 million have been made to basic education in a number of countries including Ghana, India, Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh and our largest ever single education commitment of £67 million for Uganda.

PRIME MINISTER

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the changes to EU working groups that are to be made upon final ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam. [80151]

The Prime Minister: The Treaty of Amsterdam covers a number of areas of Community competence, some of which may in time require the setting up of working groups to produce reports and recommendations on legislative proposals from the European Commission. It will be for the Committee of Permanent Representatives to decide in each case whether a Council working group needs to be established. Changes may also need to be made to the mandate of existing working groups.

Electoral Reform

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to announce his considered response to the report of Lord Jenkins of Hillhead on electoral systems. [80224]

The Prime Minister: I set out my position in the oral answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) on 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 868, where I told the House we wish to see, and be informed by, a full debate on the proposals of the Independent Commission on the Voting System before taking a firm view.

Departmental Staff (Ethnic Origin)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin at 1 March of *(a)* his private office, *(b)* Government special advisers, *(c)* the No. 10 Policy Unit and *(d)* No. 10 Downing Street staff in total. [78505]

The Prime Minister: The Government, with the Civil Service unions, recently launched a Joint Charter to address under-representation of ethnic minorities at senior levels. The Government are also setting targets for ethnic minorities in the Senior Civil Service and below.

Information on the ethnic origin of civil servants is collected on a voluntary basis, using confidential questionnaires. The number and percentage of ethnic minority staff in the private office, Government special advisers and for all staff at No. 10 Downing Street are set out in the table. I answered on 22 February 1999, *Official Report,* column *39,* for Special Advisers across Government.

Ethnic origin of No. 10 staff and special advisers

	Total	*Ethnic Minority*	*Ethnic Minority Percentage*
Private Office	9	—	—
Policy Unit	18	—	—
All Downing Street Staff	124	7	5.6
Government Special Advisers	18	—	—

To protect the privacy of individual staff, numbers relating to fewer than five people are not disclosed

CABINET OFFICE

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will publish the paper by the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser on the human health implications of genetically modified foods, requested by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Biotechnology, when he receives it. [76291]

Dr. Jack Cunningham *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser have been asked to advise Ministers on the public health implications of the genetic modification of food. Their work will be conducted in accordance with the Government's Guidelines on "The Use of Scientific Advice in Policy Making", which sets out a framework for ensuring that Government policy is made on the basis of the best scientific advice. Advice from officials to Ministers is not normally published but the possibility of publication in this case will be considered when the advice has been received.

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80524]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Home Office published an Action Plan on 23 March containing the Government's detailed response to the specific recommendations of the Macpherson inquiry. The Plan commits the Government to setting out over the coming months how they will take forward their broader vision of an anti-racist society.

The Government have already announced that they will legislate to apply the Race Relations Act, not just to the police service, but across public services as a whole. The Government are seeking to ensure that policy development take account of any race equality implications.

It is also a top priority for the Government to ensure that the Civil Service reflects the full diversity of society, and values the differences that people bring to it. It must be part of, not apart from, the society it serves. I recently launched with Sir Richard Wilson and with the Civil Service Trade Unions a Joint Charter for Action to redress the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the Senior Civil Service. The Civil Service is considering its policies as an employer in the light of the inquiry's recommendations.

The Modernising Government White Paper published on 30 March announced challenging targets for proportions of women and ethnic minorities in the Senior Civil Service. We are also requiring Departments to set targets at levels below this. These targets signal the determination of the Civil Service to address under-representation and change the culture so as to tackle inequality.

DEFENCE

NATO Exercises

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which countries had armed forces involved in the NATO air exercise over Turkey carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72852]

(2) what was the cost of the NATO air exercise in Turkey carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; and what was the cost of UK participation; [72845]

(3) how many personnel were deployed on the NATO air exercise in Turkey carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72983]

(4) what assessment he has made of the principal benefits of the NATO air exercise in Turkey carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [76594]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer March 1999]:* Exercise Distant Thunder took place in Turkey between 28 April–9 May 1997. Italy, Turkey, the US and the UK took part. There is not a figure available within NATO for the total number of personnel participating. I understand from NATO that the cost of the NATO Exercise Fund of this exercise has been estimated at some £210,000. The additional cost to the UK of participation in the exercise totalled some £11,000, with about 100 personnel participating. We do not know what the national costs to other participating nations were. Exercise Distant Thunder provided excellent training in both deployment procedures and in practising Combined Air Operations.

Building and Property Group

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what security vetting is undertaken of staff employed by Building and Property Group Ltd. and their sub-contractors operating at his Department's establishments. [80044]

Mr. Spellar: Security vetting of staff was the responsibility of BPD Ltd. until last year, when their List X status was removed. At HMNB Portsmouth, BPD Ltd. currently undertake the Basic Check procedure and may issue temporary passes, pending Counter Terrorist Check clearance being carried out by the Defence Vetting Agency.

Weaponry Gifts

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *508*, if he will state in each case *(a)* on what date the equipment listed was supplied and *(b)* its value. [80477]

Mr. George Robertson: Gifts of weaponry by Her Majesty's Government to overseas Governments and armed forces since 1 January 1990, showing the date that each item was supplied, and the value, are as follows:

Overseas Governments:

Australia

Gannet MkT5 aircraft—9 January 1995, £5,000

Belize

Harrier GR3—11 March 1994, £1,200

Stores and equipment (which included ammunition) February 1994-June 1995, £401,000

Canada

FV 433 Abbott—25 July 1994, £3,000

4 x Ferret scout cars—December 1997, £4,000

2 x Chieftain main battle tanks—30 March 1998 and 12 December 1998, £5,000 each

Other (unspecified) armoured vehicles—15 October 1992, £1,600

Chile

Harrier GR3 aircraft—24 February 1994, £1,100

Czechoslovakia

Phantom aircraft—16 January 1992, £8,500

Germany

Harrier—10 February 1992, £5,000

Phantom—10 February 1992, £8,500

Hastings aircraft—9 September 1994, £2000

FV 432 armoured vehicle and Ferret scout car—September 1994, £500

2 x Centurion main battle tanks—20 October 1994, £5,700

Jordan

Hunter aircraft (and spares)—15 December 1994, £22,000

Luxembourg

25 pounder gun—14 May 1993, £2,000

Lebanon

500 x self loading rifles—7 July 1995, £32,500

Norway

Canberra aircraft—4 May 1995, £3,000

Nepal

70 x light machine guns—16 February 1993, £7,000

Self loading rifles and light machine guns—August 1994, £10,000

Ancillaries for light machine guns—31 May 1995, £18

Romania and Bulgaria

(Gifted through the Western European Union)

Combat support boats—10 August 1993, £4,500 (Plus £32,000 transportation costs)

Zimbabwe

1,000 rounds of ammunition—17 February 1994, £375

Armed forces:

Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion

Anti-tank weapons—14 May 1996, £20

France

AR Martel missiles—April-July 1994, £30,000

Netherlands

Rifle—21 May 1991, £30

Nepal

15 x Ferret scout cars—5 August 1994, £3,750

Ferret spares—4 November 1996, £7,000.

Much of the equipment listed was gifted for display in national, service or other official museums in the countries concerned.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many attack missions against Yugoslavia have been flown by British aircraft in the two weeks up to 31 March; and what was the cost of them to the British public funds. [80425]

Mr. George Robertson: As part of Operation Allied Force, a total of 50 sorties were flown by UK ground attack aircraft in the period up to 6.00 a.m. on 1 April 1999, at an estimated total extra cost excluding munitions, of some £360,000.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* bombs and *(b)* missiles paid for by British public funds have been used to attack Yugoslavia in the two weeks up to 31 March; and what was their total cost. [80427]

Mr. George Robertson: A total of 14 bombs were dropped by UK aircraft in support of Operation Allied Force during the period in question. These bombs cost a total of some £520,000. I am withholding the information requested in respect of missiles under exemption 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what latest estimate he has made of the total cost of resolving the year 2000 computer problem in all defence-related areas; how much has been spent to date; and if he will make a statement. [79805]

Mr. Spellar: The projected additional cost of the MoD Year 2000 date change compliancy programme remains at £200m. Actual expenditure by MoD's top-level Budget Holders at the end of February 1999 was £48.5m. These figures include the cost of all activities to address the problem which we would not otherwise have needed to undertake. However, they exclude the cost of any equipment procurements or upgrades which were already planned and funded to meet a requirement of operational or business reasons, but which also address the Y2K issue. They also exclude the cost of internal MOD staff effort to ensure that our systems are compliant.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what precautions are being taken by Her Majesty's armed forces over the period 30 December 1999 to 5 January 2000 to ensure defence capability is not damaged by the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [79806]

Mr. Spellar: The MoD has had a technical programme in place since 1996 to scope and address the problem of computer system compliancy with the Year 2000 date change. This programme is progressing well, with over 60 per cent. of MoD's critical systems now compliant. In addition, comprehensive contingency plans are being developed against the possibility of unexpected failure of MoD systems, or the failure of other non-MoD systems on which we rely, such as the public utilities. These plans seek to ensure the continuity of military operations and the requisite levels of defence capability throughout the period 1 September 1999 to 31 March 2000. There are also well-established procedures for crisis management on a 24-hour basis, which will apply throughout this period.

Royal Navy Physiological Laboratory

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *307*, how many goats have died in experiments at the Royal Navy Physiological Laboratory in *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* each of the previous five years; how many have been injured before undergoing experiments; what anaesthetics are administered to goats; and if he will list the experiments that have been performed on goats. [79725]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Sir John Chisholm to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 14 April 1999:

I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question about the former Royal Navy Physiological Laboratory (RNPL) which is now part of the Centre for Human Sciences (CHS) Sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

You asked for information about DERA's research programme to determine the pressure and time limits for the safe escape of Navy personnel from a sunken submarine involving the use of goats. In addition to the ongoing escape programme carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, DERA is also taking part in a 3 year co-operative programme with the United States Navy looking at submarine rescue. All of these experiments involve exposing goats to altered pressure and atmospheres similar to those that would be experienced by submariners evacuating a sunken submarine.

You asked what number of goats have died in experiments in the last 12 months and each of the last five years. DERA reports its statistics to the Home Office by calendar year and, in order to avoid confusion, I will follow the same format here. The experiments themselves do not cause death. The goats are closely monitored throughout the experiments and if signs of decompression sickness occur the goats may be recompressed in the same way as divers and submariners. Alternatively, if their condition warrants, they are humanely killed at that point. In each of the previous 5 years the numbers humanely killed during or following experiments were as follows:

Year	*Number of goats*
1994	2
1995	8
1996	5
1997	1
1998	11

Since 1 January 1999, 9 goats have been humanely killed during or following experiments. It is likely that the total number of goats killed in 1999 will be higher than in recent years for three reasons. Firstly, two research programmes are being carried out concurrently and, secondly, the conditions of the co-operative rescue programme are such that more animals will be humanely killed in the early stages. Thirdly, a restocking programme has started as many of the goats are getting old and these also, will be humanely killed.

None of the goats are injured prior to the experiments.

The anaesthetics administered to the goats are as follows

Rompun and Domitor (sedative/analgesic)
Torbugesic (analgesic)
Halothane/oxygen/nitrous oxide (general anaesthetic)
Lignocaine (local anaesthetic)
Sodium pentobarbitone (lethal injection by anaesthetic)

The dosages are as recommended by the independent veterinary surgeon and administered by trained and licensed staff.

I hope this is helpful.

TREASURY

Departmental Policies

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what systems he has in place to ensure that policies being developed by his Department are subject to a crime impact *(a)* assessment and *(b)* audit and are not likely to lead to enhanced criminal opportunities. [72690]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* Government Departments are co-operating closely on policy development and, therefore, I work closely with other Ministers on any likely implications for crime of new developments, as indicated by research.

As far as the Treasury is concerned, all our policies should support Home Office Aim 1, which is to reduce crime and the fear of crime. The Home Office research programme monitors and evaluates the effects of new policy and other interventions.

Child Poverty

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what definition of poverty underlies his statement in this year's Budget statement that 700,000 children will be taken out of poverty as a result of the Budget. [78522]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 March 1999]:* The estimate of 700,000 children is based on the number of children in low income families who will no longer be living in households below half the average equivalised income after allowing for housing costs. This calculation looks at the impact of all the tax and benefit measures announced in the last two Budgets, the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit and National Minimum Wage.

This method is one snap-shot indicator of one dimension of relative poverty. Child poverty is complex. It is characterised by a number of related problems, including persistent low family incomes caused by parental unemployment, damaged opportunities later in life, and too often a poor education in childhood.

The Government's strategy for reducing poverty and social exclusion is tackling all aspects of poverty and tackling it at source. It is focused on investment in prevention, work as the best way out of poverty and regenerating the poorest communities, while providing support for those who cannot work.

The Government's report on the progress being made on tackling poverty and social exclusion, due to be published in early summer, will explain our policy priorities in more depth and include a range of low income indicators.

Children's Tax Credit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the numbers of higher rate taxpayers who will pay a 46 per cent. marginal rate of income tax consequent upon the tapering of the children's tax credit *(a)* in total, *(b)* where the taxpayer is the sole earner in the family and *(c)* where the taxpayer is the sole higher rate taxpayer in the family. [79091]

Ms Hewitt: It is estimated that in 2001–02 there will be 300,000 taxpayers on the children's tax credit taper. Of these, around 90,000 will be the sole earner in the family. In very few cases will there be two higher rate taxpayers in the family.

Road Fuel Duty

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated extra revenue, including the added effects of VAT, from the road fuel duty escalator in the Budget statements for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1996–97, *(d)* 1997–98 and *(e)* 1998–99; and what was the actual revenue accrued, including the added effects of VAT, in those years. [79322]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* Estimates of the extra revenue, including VAT, from the road fuel duty escalator are shown in the Financial Statement and Budget Reports for the relevant years in the following tables:

1993–94: Table 4.1

1994–95: Table 4.1 and paragraph 5 of Annex B to Chapter 4

1995–96: Table 5.1 and Table 5B.2

1996–97: Table 5.1 and Table 5B.2

1997–98: Table 6.1 and Table 6B.2

1998–99: Table 2.2 and Table 2B.2.

It is not possible to isolate the extra revenue actually accrued from the escalator in isolation from the other factors influencing receipts.

Birth Statistics

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of the last 10 years the percentage of births among (i) 13 to 15 and (ii) 16 to 19-year-olds per 1,000 females for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and Wales, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each other European Union country. [79591]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Helen Brinton, dated 14 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on teenage births.

The attached Table 1 shows livebirth rates for girls aged under 16 and 16–19 per 1000 female population aged 13–15 and 16–19 respectively.

Figures for other European Union countries are not readily available for the age-groups requested, but their teenage fertility rates are shown in the attached Table 2. The rates are for women aged under 20 at the end of the year, per 1000 female population aged 15–19, and are therefore not directly comparable to those shown above which are for women aged under 20 at maternity.

Table 1: Livebirth rates for girls aged under 16 and 16–19 per 1000 female population aged 13–15 and 16–19 respectively

	Scotland		*England and Wales*		*N. Ireland*	
	Under 16[1]	*16–19*	*Under 16*[1]	*16–19*	*Under*[1]	*16–19*
1988	1.5	38.0	1.4	38.9	1.1	37.5
1989	1.3	37.0	1.5	38.0	0.9	35.5
1990	1.4	38.1	1.5	39.7	1.0	35.4
1991	1.3	40.1	1.7	39.2	1.0	35.2
1992	1.5	39.4	1.5	37.7	0.9	37.3
1993	1.4	37.5	1.6	37.2	0.9	34.0
1994	1.4	34.5	1.4	35.5	1.3	32.4
1995	1.7	34.3	1.6	35.1	1.2	29.3
1996	1.7	36.3	1.7	36.4	1.4	31.7
1997	1.9	37.3	1.7	36.5	1.1	36.1

[1] Rates for under 16s include a very small number of births to mothers aged under 13

Table 2: Fertility rates per 1000 female population aged under 20 at 31 December

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Belgium	8.9	8.6	8.8	7.9	8.6	8.9	8.6	8.0	6.7	6.7	n/a
Denmark	6.7	6.5	6.3	6.5	9.1	6.6	7.0	6.7	6.8	6.1	n/a
Germany	13.0	13.2	14.0	14.2	14.6	13.8	12.7	11.2	10.1	9.4	9.6
Greece	25.9	22.6	19.1	17.3	15.6	13.9	13.2	11.7	10.7	10.0	9.7
Spain	13.1	12.3	11.9	10.3	9.3	8.7	8.0	7.3	6.6	6.3	n/a
France	10.8	9.9	9.4	9.1	9.2	9.3	8.8	8.1	7.3	6.9	6.8
Ireland	12.4	12.6	12.1	11.5	13.1	13.5	13.0	12.7	11.6	11.8	12.7
Italy	11.1	10.3	9.8	6.9	6.5	6.2	5.6	6.0	5.6	5.3	n/a
Luxembourg	6.7	8.2	10.1	8.7	14.1	9.6	9.1	9.0	8.5	6.8	7.0
Netherlands	5.1	5.2	5.6	5.9	6.4	6.3	5.8	5.4	5.1	4.2	4.1
Austria	17.8	16.7	16.7	16.4	16.4	17.8	17.9	17.0	14.4	12.9	11.5

Table 2: Fertility rates per 1000 female population aged under 20 at 31 December

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Portugal	24.2	22.5	21.4	20.8	18.9	18.5	17.9	18.1	17.3	16.7	16.7
Finland	9.5	8.9	9.1	8.7	8.7	8.6	8.2	7.6	7.0	6.7	6.9
Sweden	7.9	7.4	7.8	8.9	9.8	9.2	8.3	7.7	6.7	6.1	5.5
UK	23.9	24.5	25.9	25.7	27.0	26.9	25.8	24.7	22.7	22.0	22.9

Source:
Eurostat

National Changeover Plan

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the non-IT costs of the National Changeover Plan, with particular reference to informing business and the public. [80397]

Ms Hewitt: The cost of informing business and the public about the changeover would depend on the final approach taken to the changeover. By planning ahead, we will be able to ensure that a UK changeover would be cost effective for the economy as a whole.

Euro Coins

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *100*, on euro coins, what sanctions are to be applied in the case of the United Kingdom against those who damage or destroy the image of the euro; and what representations he has received on this subject. [80178]

Ms Hewitt: In the case of non-participating Member States, enforcement of the copyright in the common face design of euro coins will be ensured by the Commission, according to the national legislation of the Member State concerned. In the UK, enforcement would take the form of civil proceedings.

Workless Households

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many workless households with dependent children there were in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1984, *(c)* 1989, *(d)* 1994 and *(e)* at the latest date for which statistics are available. [79661]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Frank Field, dated 14 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on workless households with dependent children.

The ONS introduced Labour Force Survey (LFS) databases especially designed for analyses of household data in August 1998. The earliest data available is for spring 1990. Hence, figures can only be given for 1990, 1994 and the latest date available, 1998. These figures are shown in the table.

Numbers of workless working age households with dependant children, Spring, United Kingdom

Year	
1990	800,000
1994	1,238,000
1998	1,164,000

These figures were published in an article in the January 1999 edition of *Labour Market Trends* (pp 31—40), a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Cancer (Survival and Mortality Rates)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list national survival rates for all cancers for each year from 1992 to date. [80271]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 14 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on cancer survival rates.

Survival rates in England and Wales were most recently published in ONS Monitor MBI 98/1, for cancers diagnosed in 1981 and 1989, followed up to the end of 1994. The relative survival rates at one- and five-years after diagnosis for all cancers as shown in this publication are given in the table below. This publication, which is available in the House of Commons Library, also presents survival rates for the major types of cancer in men and women.

One and five-year relative survival (%), all cancers diagnosed in 1981 and 1989, England and Wales

	One-year survival		Five-year survival	
	1981	1989	1981	1989
Males aged 0–84	37.0	44.3	19.5	24.7
Females aged 0–84	50.3	56.3	31.7	37.5

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list mortality rates for all types of cancers for each health authority; [80272]

(2) if he will list mortality rates of cancers for all types of cancer, in descending order, for each EU country. [80273]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 14 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary questions on mortality rates of cancers.

The information requested is given in the attached tables.

Mortality rates from all cancers[1] in persons of all ages
Age-standardised[2] mortality rates per 100,000 population, 1995, (unless otherwise stated)

	Male rate	Female rate
Austria	250	153
Belgium (1993)	305	153
Denmark	294	220
Finland	220	130
France	292	129
Germany	263	157
Greece	221	115
Ireland	264	177
Italy (1994)	276	143
Luxembourg	300	147
Netherlands	282	159
Portugal	235	126
Spain	262	118
Sweden	191	142
United Kingdom	257	172

[1] Malignant neoplasms, International Classification of Diseases (Ninth Revision) codes 140–208
[2] Age-standardised rates are directly age-standardised to the European Standard Population

Mortality rates from all cancers[1] in persons of all ages
Age-standardised[2] mortality rates per 100,000 population in the period 1995–97 (England), 1997 (Wales)

Health Authorities (boundaries as of April 1996)	Male rate	Female rate
England		
Bradford	248	173
County Durham	288	187
East Riding	264	179
Gateshead & South Tyneside	318	196
Leeds	254	176
Newcastle & North Tyneside	302	208
North Cumbria	256	169
Northumberland	275	177
Sunderland	296	190
Tees	304	191
Wakefield Health Care	271	179
North Yorkshire	219	155
Calderdale & Kirklees	246	165
Barnsley	266	183
North Derbyshire	252	177
South Derbyshire	242	162
Doncaster	286	185
Leicestershire	217	161
Lincolnshire	235	159
North Nottinghamshire	254	174
Nottingham	258	169
Rotherham	257	191
Sheffield	277	186
South Humber	278	182
Bedfordshire	237	160
Berkshire	228	157
Buckinghamshire	215	161
Cambridge & Huntingdon	213	151
East Norfolk	225	156
Northamptonshire	254	167
North West Anglia	228	164
Oxfordshire	216	161
Suffolk	224	157
Hillingdon	232	174
Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster	223	161
Enfield & Haringey	233	158
Redbridge & Waltham Forest	230	152
Barking & Havering	272	186
Barnet	197	158
Brent & Harrow	215	161
Camden & Islington	244	176
Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow	233	172
East London & The City	279	185
North Essex	226	162
South Essex	250	174
East & North Hertfordshire	222	162
West Hertfordshire	215	164
Bexley & Greenwich	262	171
Bromley	236	169
Croydon	233	173
East Kent	258	165
West Kent	247	169
Kingston & Richmond	233	157
Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham	272	177
Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth	249	164
East Surrey	211	142
West Surrey	223	160
East Sussex, Brighton & Hove	233	158
West Sussex	223	154
North & Mid Hampshire	225	157
Portsmouth & South East Hampshire	248	168
Southampton & South West Hampshire	237	157
Isle of Wight	222	152
Somerset	230	152
South & West Devon	235	162
Wiltshire	221	164
Avon	229	157
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	232	170
Dorset	228	154
North & East Devon	216	150
Gloucestershire	224	157
Birmingham	254	172
Coventry	241	172
Dudley	247	168
Herefordshire	227	152
Sandwell	285	182
Shropshire	244	167
Solihull	229	169
North Staffordshire	284	178
South Stafforshire	250	165
Walsall	261	164
Warwickshire	242	170
Wolverhampton	257	174
Worcestershire	230	161
South Lancashire	253	169
Liverpool	336	226
Manchester	321	209
Morecambe Bay	244	163
St. Helens & Knowsley	311	200
Salford & Trafford	282	197
Sefton	273	186
Stockport	241	168
West Pennine	287	180
Bury & Rochdale	262	199
North Cheshire	287	186
South Cheshire	240	160
East Lancashire	261	177
North West Lancashire	250	174
Wigan & Bolton	263	173
Wirral	276	185
Wales		
North Wales	252	165
Dyfed Powys	219	165
Morgannwg	257	167
Bro Taf	253	177
Gwent	247	162

[1] Malignant neoplasms, International Classification of Diseases (Ninth Revision) codes 140–208
[2] Age-standardised rates are directly age-standardised to the European Standard Population

Exchange Rate

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on the exchange rate between sterling and the deutschmark. [80404]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's aim is for a stable and competitive exchange rate over the medium term, consistent with the objective of price stability. The only sure path to long-term exchange rate stability is through the pursuit of macroeconomic policies aimed at achieving sustained growth, sound public finances and low inflation.

EU Financing Arrangements

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net contributions of each member state of the European Union of the changes to EU financing arrangements agreed at the Berlin summit. [80015]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) on 29 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *737*.

Financial Services and Markets

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish further clauses of the draft Financial Services and Markets Bill. [80811]

Ms Hewitt: I have today made available to the Joint Committee on Financial Services and Markets four additional Parts of the draft Bill. These relate to official listing, collective investment schemes, disclosure of information and insolvency. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Endowment Policies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has requested *(a)* the Financial Services Authority and *(b)* the Personal Investment Authority to consider the advice required on the early termination and surrender of endowment policies. [80510]

Ms Hewitt: The Financial Services Authority is monitoring sales of mortgage-linked endowment policies. If there is a need for regulatory guidance, in respect of early termination and surrender, the regulator will act accordingly.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Postal Workers

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will provide a breakdown by job centre of vacancies notified for postal workers in the last year for which figures are available. [80453]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given and a copy placed in the Library.

Skyline College, UAE

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations have been made by his Department regarding the censorship at Skyline College in the United Arab Emirates referred to in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education report 1998. [79941]

Mr. Mudie: The Department has not made any representations on this issue, but we believe that universities should always consider the ethical dimension of their activities.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) conducts a programme of audits of institutions' overseas partnerships, and we are aware of the QAA audit report about the quality assurance arrangements of the collaborative partnership between the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside and Skyline College, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. We note that the QAA has asked the University to examine without delay the possible implications of restrictions in learning materials, which may be excluding its students from a body of scholarship on grounds of authors' race or creed.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young unemployed people he estimates will join the New Deal programme in 1999–2000, broken down by suitable locality. [80899]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The New Deal for young people is delivered through local partnerships. For planning purposes, the Employment Service has provided its partners in each local unit of delivery with an indicative assumption for the numbers of young people who might join the programme in 1999–2000. Those planning assumptions are based on current unemployment levels. They are not forecasts of the actual numbers who will join the programme. They do however enable the Employment Service and its partners in each local area to plan on a better informed basis, and they help to ensure that adequate plans are in place locally to meet potential demand.

I am placing in the Library a list showing the indicative planning assumption for the New Deal for young people in each unit of delivery.

Departmental Investment Strategy

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish details of his Department's Departmental Investment Strategy. [80900]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Copies of the Departmental Investment Strategy report have been placed in the Library. In line with Government policy on electronic government this document will also be available on the DfEE internet site shortly.

Digital Educational Broadcasting

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will announce his decision on the recent competition for the provision of digital educational broadcasting services to support the GCSE curriculum. [80901]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Following careful consideration of the bids received and presentations of the various proposals we are now inviting the short-listed bidders to take part in demonstration projects to test curriculum modules to support GCSE subjects. The resultant materials will be tested and evaluated as a basis for further decisions at a later date.

Education Costs (Recovery)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to recover the cost of education in the state sector of foreign children temporarily resident in the United Kingdom whose parents have received specific educational grants from their home Government; and if he will make a statement. [79689]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have no plans to change the current arrangements. We believe that all children resident in this country should be entitled to receive a free school education. Foreign children are treated in the same way as other children in the calculation of the Government's support for education through the standard spending assessment system.

Local Education Support Division

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff are employed within the Local Education Authority Support Division of his Department; and what is *(a)* the cost of that division in 1998–99 and *(b)* the budgeted cost for 1999–2000. [80388]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The Local Education Authority Support Division, within the Department for Education and Employment, has a staffing establishment of 50 people; a further 4 people are currently employed to support the change process to the new organisational structure.

Appointments to the Division, made through open competition, include existing staff from within the

Department and the Funding Agency for Schools as well as some external candidates.

The budget cost of the Division in 1998–99 was £440,000.

The budget cost for the Division in 1999–2000 is £1,629,000.

New Deal

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what statistical data he has collated on the destination of those who have completed a 12 month educational training option on the New Deal for 18 to 25 year olds. [80563]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Statistics are collected on various aspects of New Deal performance including destinations of those leaving New Deal from an Option. The latest figures are available in table 11 of the New Deal Statistical First Release, which is held in the Library. However, as New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds only started in Pathfinder areas in January 1998 and nationally in April 1998, very few will have had the opportunity to complete a 12 month Full-Time Education and Training Option. The results of early quantitative evaluation of Options in the Pathfinder areas will be published in the Summer.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list *(a)* those local education authorities in England which are budgeting to spend more in 1999–2000 than provided for in their education standard spending assessment, and *(b)* which of these authorities are proposing a budget increase for education in 1999–2000 which is less than the increase in their education standard spending provision compared with 1998–99. [80499]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Authoritative information will not be available until June 1999 when local education authorities' returns in accordance with section 52 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 have been collated and checked.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the Government's current policy in relation to the reports of the three United Nations panels on Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [80515]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The panels' reports form a good basis for Security Council discussion on the way forward on Iraq.

The disarmament panel has endorsed what has long been clear: that UNSCOM has achieved an enormous amount, but that there are still important questions left unanswered. The panel has also stated clearly that Iraq has not fulfilled its obligations. We share the panel's view that if the inspectors are to go back into Iraq they will need a system more, not less, intrusive than before.

Iraq's refusal to come clean over its weapons of mass destruction has prevented any movement on sanctions. Compliance with Security Council resolutions is an essential prerequisite for lifting sanctions. Our insistence on Iraq meeting its obligations does not mean we can ignore the suffering of the Iraqi people. We are pleased that the humanitarian panel has picked up many of our proposals on how to improve international efforts to alleviate this suffering, on how to increase the amount of money going into the oil-for-food programme and ensuring it is used as effectively as possible.

Neither should we lose sight of the fate of the Kuwaitis and others still missing since the Gulf War ended in 1991, on which Iraq has remained shamelessly silent. I welcome the third panel's support for the Tripartite Commission chaired by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and echo its call for Iraq to co-operate fully.

Human Rights

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to publish the annual report on human rights. [80575]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Government's Annual Report on Human Rights for 1999 will be laid before Parliament as a Command Paper by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development during the present Parliamentary session.

Ascension Islands (Oil Storage)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of efficacy of a shore-based solution for the bulk oil storage arrangements of the Ascension Islands. [79809]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I have been asked to reply.

Following a review of strategic stock holdings at Ascension Island, my Department is considering the optimum arrangements for the future storage of fuel stocks. As part of this work, we are examining the amount of on-island fuel storage infrastructure currently available, whether additional storage is necessary and whether this can be provided more cost effectively than under present arrangements utilising the chartered vessel MV Maersk Ascension.

Chechnya

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the advice he has placed in the Library in respect of people travelling to Chechnya was issued to individual visa applicants employed by Granger Telecom or was issued to the company that employed them. [66960]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[pursuant to his reply, 21 January 1999, c. 536–37]:* Granger Telecom have informed FCO officials that as a result of Granger's meeting with

FCO officials on 21 August 1998, Granger management did not re-consult their field staff about their willingness to work in Chechnya, but Granger Telecom directors discussed the advice given to Granger by the FCO at that meeting. Granger Telecom have reaffirmed that they drew to the attention of their field staff the FCO travel advice for Russia which stated:

"We strongly advise against travel to the Chechen Republic ... because of the unstable security situation. Visitors have been kidnapped in these areas recently."

HOME DEPARTMENT

Transsexuals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to review the legal status of transsexual people. [81107]

Mr. Straw: My officials will chair an inter-departmental Working Group on transsexuals. This will have the following terms of reference:

"To consider, with particular reference to birth certificates, the need for appropriate legal measures to address the problems experienced by transsexuals, having due regard to scientific and societal developments, and measures undertaken in other countries to deal with this issue."

Membership:

Department for Education and Employment

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Department of Health

Home Office

Lord Chancellor's Department

Office of Law Reform, Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland General Register Office

Office for National Statistics

Scottish Office

Scottish General Register Office

Department for Social Security

Welsh Office.

I have asked the Group to report its findings to Ministers by Easter 2000.

Prisoners (Drug-free Medicine)

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what studies have been carried out into the effect of withdrawing from prisoners constitutional integrated drug-free medicine received for patterns of addiction, violence and related disturbances; [80137]

(2) what assessment he has made of the constitutional integrated drug-free medical treatment programme established in HMP Coldingley, Feltham and Downview by Complementary Medical Services for Prisoners and the effects reported by prisoners; [80138]

(3) when the Prison Service instruction to governors regarding the provision of complementary medical services to prisoners will be issued; who was consulted in formulating this policy; and what assessment he has made of the impact it will have on the provision of constitutional drug-free medicine within the prison service; [80166]

(4) what assessment the Minister of State responsible for Prisons has made of the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency's report on the complementary medical treatment programme at HM Prison Coldingley; and if he will make a statement. [80167]

Mr. George Howarth: The report by the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency provides a general evaluation of the complementary medical treatment pilot at Coldingley and records the broadly positive and supportive views of patients. It makes proposals for improving the organisation of the service and for future research. The report does not provide a detailed assessment of the therapeutic value of all the treatments and practices involved nor of the resource and other implications of continuing the programme or extending it to other prisons.

The Prison Service, recognising the need to establish clear guidelines about the place of complementary therapies alongside conventional health care provided to prisoners, and having consulted the Department of Health, has concluded that only a limited number of complementary therapies of potential benefit to prisoners and prison regimes should be provided in prison, subject to an assessment of health needs and overall budgeting constraints. Provision will have to be on the basis of an assessed health need and in the context of an integrated health improvement plan, as described in the Government's announcement of 29 March 1999, *Official Report,* columns *556–58,* on the future organisation of prison health care. Service providers will be required to show that they operate within accepted professional standards of competence. An instruction will shortly be issued to all Prison Service establishments to explain this policy.

The Prison Service has not carried out research into the effects of limiting the range of complementary therapies.

Schengen Accords

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those elements of the Schengen supplementary accords, copies of which his Department had not received at the time of the formal application to join elements of the Schengen system; and if he will make a statement on his plans to place them in the Library. [80398]

Kate Hoey: As no formal application has yet been made by the Government it is not possible to list those elements of the Schengen supplementary accords copies of which the Home Department had not received at the time of the formal application. The Government will continue to place all further Declarations and Directives of the Schengen Executive Committee in the Library as they are received, where these are not classified.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to report to the House on the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 12 March. [80494]

Kate Hoey: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 29 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *532*.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what account he took of the geographical extent of bee activity when deciding the extent of the sanitary cordon around genetically modified trial crops. [75093]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Each application for the release of genetically modified (GM) plants for research purposes is supported by a risk assessment, which is evaluated by Government experts and independent scientists on the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE). Their consideration will include the possible spread of GM pollen by all means, including bee activity, and its likely consequences. One member of ACRE is an expert on bees and their behaviour. Based on the type of GM plant, how it has been modified and the circumstances of the proposed release it may be judged necessary to minimise the potential for cross-pollination of neighbouring sexually compatible crops or wild relatives by the GM plants. The precautions taken to prevent or reduce cross-pollination include the removal of flowers, specific isolation distances between GM and non-GM plants or borders of non-GM plants around the plots of GM plants. It has to be recognised however that bee activity may in some cases involve the dissemination of GM pollen beyond the isolation distances traditionally used.

Speed Limit Repeater Signs

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received in favour of permitting repeater signs indicating the 30 mph speed limit in built-up areas; and if he will make a statement. [79690]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We regularly receive a small number of letters requesting that repeater signs be allowed so as to reinforce the 30 mph speed limit. We are currently conducting a speed policy review which will consider all speed related issues, including the role signs play in managing traffic speeds.

Motorcycle Advisory Group

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what the terms of reference of the Government's motorcycle advisory group will be; [79928]

(2) which non-governmental groups will be invited to join the Government's advisory group on motorcycling; [79927]

(3) what steps he is currently undertaking to encourage the use of small motorcycles. [79926]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Arrangements will be made shortly for the convening of the first formal meeting of the Motorcycling Advisory Group. We will announce the date and the Group membership shortly. The Terms of Reference will be finalised at this meeting. However, a central feature will be to consider the role of motorcycling in our integrated transport policy.

We are already providing assistance over motorcycle security in that we are supporting Lord Rotherwick's Bill, introduced on 30 March, which will enable local authorities to provide secure parking devices.

Residential Leasehold Reform

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many submissions he received in response to the Government's Green Paper on Residential Leasehold Reform in England and Wales by 31 March. [80645]

Mr. Raynsford: We had received 923 responses to the consultation paper by 31 March.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the setting of the standard spending assessment level for the planning period in respect of local authority road maintenance expenditure. [80400]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* This was amongst the issues discussed as part of the overall level of expenditure for transport and local authorities during the CSR period.

Housing Projections (Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact that his revision downwards on the projection of the number of houses that will need to be built between now and 2016 will have on the projected number of houses needed in *(a)* Essex and *(b)* Mid-Essex. [80289]

Mr. Raynsford: As the Deputy Prime Minister said in his answer on 29 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *472*, my Department will be writing to regional planning bodies setting out further information which may be relevant in the context of preparing regional planning guidance.

English Nature

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish a statement defining the strategic relationship between English Nature and his Department. [80902]

Mr. Meale: We have published today, the "English Nature Management Study", copies of which can be found in the House Libraries.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Licences

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licences were *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused between 3 August and 31 December 1998 for

the export of military or police goods to (1) Angola, (2) Chad, (3) the Democratic Republic of Congo, (4) Namibia, (5) Uganda and (6) Zimbabwe; and if he will specify the number of licences granted in each of the categories set out under Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994. [80502]

Dr. Howells: The entry in the relevant legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating. The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the following results were obtained. Between 3 August and 31 December 1998, 16 Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and 7 Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) were issued covering the export to consignees or end-users in the specified countries of goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, the so-called Military List. In the same period, no applications for such licences were refused. Individual licences may cover a range of goods with various ratings (and OIELs may also cover a range of countries). Where this is so, the licence is included in the Table in the total for all of the relevant ratings and/or countries.

SIELs issued between 3 August 1998 and 31 December 1998 covering the export of goods on the Military List

Number issued covering goods with this rating

	Angola	Chad	DR Congo	Namibia	Uganda	Zimbabwe
ML1	0	0	0	1	0	3
ML2	0	0	0	0	0	1
ML3	0	0	0	0	0	1
ML5	0	0	0	0	0	1
ML6	1	0	0	0	1	0
ML11	0	0	0	2	0	2
ML13	1	0	0	0	0	1
ML15	0	0	0	0	0	1
PL5017	0	0	0	0	0	1
[illegible]	1	0	0	0	0	0
[illegible]	1	0	0	0	0	0

OIELs issued between 3 August 1998 and 31 December 1998 covering the export of goods on the Military List

Number issued covering goods with this rating

	Angola	Chad	DR Congo	Namibia	Uganda	Zimbabwe
ML1	0	0	0	0	0	2
ML2	0	0	0	0	0	1
ML3	0	0	0	1	0	2
ML10	0	1	0	0	0	1
ML15	0	0	0	0	1	1
PL 5002	0	0	0	1	0	2
PL 5018	0	0	0	0	0	1

This information does not cover any Media OIELs that may have been issued during this period. Media OIELs authorise the export to all destinations of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists, when working in areas of conflict.

This information should be considered in light of the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

In addition, goods on the Military List may have been exported under certain Open General Export Licences; copies of all Open General Export Licences valid at any time during the period are in the Library of House.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export licences for the export of military equipment to Sri Lanka have been refused in each of the last five years. [80439]

Dr. Howells: The entry in the relevant legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating. The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the following results were obtained. Between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1998, six applications for Standard Individual Export Licences covering the export to consignees or end-users in Sri Lanka of goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, the so-called Military List, were refused. In the same period, no applications for Open Individual Export Licences covering such exports were refused. Individual licences may cover a range of goods with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the Table in the total for all of the relevant ratings.

Individual Licences refused in each calendar year covering the export to Sri Lanka of goods on the Military List

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Number of refusals	2	0	1	0	3
Number of applications refused in each year covering goods with this rating					
ML1	1	0	0	0	3
ML2	0	0	0	0	1
ML3	1	0	0	0	0
ML4	0	0	1	0	0

This information does not cover any applications for Media OIELs that have been refused during this period. Media OIELs authorise the export to all destinations of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists, when working in areas of conflict.

This information should be considered in light of the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

Supermarkets

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to ensure any reference of supermarkets to the MMC includes a request that the investigation considers the commercial relationships between supermarkets and (i) farmers and (ii) growers. [80583]

Dr. Howells: The Director General of Fair Trading announced on 8 April that he had referred supermarkets to the Competition Commission. The terms of reference are a matter for him. In his press notice (a copy of which is in the Library of the House) announcing the reference the Director General identified as one important issue the

nature of the relationship between the multiples and their suppliers, including agricultural producers and the ways in which buyer power is exerted.

Arms Exports

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 9 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *202–03*, on export licences to Indonesia, for what reason the number of ML1 standard individual export licences listed for 1997 and 1998 was fewer than the number reported in the answer to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) of 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *345–46*. [80012]

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) referred in her answer of 8 April 1998, *Official Report*, columns *345–46*, to her earlier answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*, in which she had said that information derived from the Export Control Organisation's computer databases should be treated as indicative only because of problems that had been identified in them; and that new checking procedures had been introduced and would be backdated to cover information recorded since 2 May 1997.

The discrepancy to which my hon. Friend draws attention arose because one export licence which actually only covered electronic goods with a rating of ML11 was found to have been recorded on the databases with ratings of ML11 and ML1. This error was corrected before I gave my answer of 9 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *202–03;* and that correction is the reason for the discrepancy. It did not affect the total number of licences or the number of licences with a rating of ML11 in either Answer.

The information contained in the recent Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls may be treated as definitive, subject to the constraint that there is always some small risk of human error in the compilation of so much data.

Consumer Councils

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the Government's response to consultation on proposals to establish consumer councils for the energy, telecommunications and water sectors. [81139]

Mr. Battle: On 30 September last year, the Government published a consultation paper on their proposals for establishing independent consumer councils for the water, energy and telecommunications sectors. The establishment of independent consumer councils for the utility sectors is a vital element in the Government's broader agenda for reforming the framework for utility regulation so that it delivers a fair deal for consumers.

The Government received over 130 responses to the consultation paper. In addition, they held discussions with a wide range of interested parties. These indicated strong support for the approach set out in the consultation paper.

The consultation paper looked in detail at a number of important issues such as the functions and powers of the future consumer councils; their structure and organisation; and the framework for establishing strong and constructive links with the utility regulators' offices. The Government have considered the representations made on these matters and announced their decisions on the way forward on 8 April.

In taking forward proposals for the consumer councils, the Government have had four key concerns: firstly to create independent and influential consumer advocates, with a voice at the heart of the regulatory system, advising the utility regulators, utility companies and others on consumer issues; secondly, to ensure that all consumers have a one stop shop they can go to when they have unresolved grievances about the standards of service or conduct of a utility company; thirdly, to provide consumers with a source of good quality information and advice on getting the best deal from the utility markets. Influential councils and well-informed consumers can play a key part in driving standards up, and prices down. Finally, the new arrangements must provide for an open, professional and co-ordinated relationship between the new councils and the utility regulators.

Implementation of the Government's proposals will require legislation. We intend to introduce legislation to implement these proposals along with the Government's other proposals for the reform of utility regulation as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

These proposals are generally intended to apply to consumer arrangements in the whole of the UK. They do not, however, extend to Northern Ireland, in respect of the water and energy sectors, nor to Scotland in respect of the water sector.

We propose to give the councils broad functions within the regulatory system. They will act as public advocates for all utility consumers in their sectors, and will be expected to provide information and advice on consumer issues to regulators, Government, Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the media and others. They will draw attention to areas requiring action by the companies, utility regulators and others. And they will publish information and advice of interest and assistance to consumers, such as advice on securing the best deal from utility companies. These broad functions will ensure that the councils have flexibility to investigate and advise on the consumer issues of the moment.

These functions will be underpinned by a research capacity to ensure that issues of concern to consumers, including particular groups of consumers such as the disadvantaged or small businesses, or those in a particular region, can be investigated, and that the councils can speak with knowledge and authority.

In addition, we propose giving the councils the specific task of handling consumer complaints against utility companies where these have not been resolved by the company concerned. Where possible, we will expect the councils to try to mediate a satisfactory outcome between the company and the complainant. Where further action such as enforcement action may be required, the council will also pass the complaint on to the appropriate regulatory authority. We also anticipate the councils working constructively with the utility companies to reduce the causes of complaints.

An effective framework for collaboration between the councils and the utility regulators will be required. To achieve this, we intend to place a duty on the council and the relevant utility regulator to agree and then publish a memorandum of understanding (MoU). The detailed content will be a matter for the parties to agree, but we expect it to cover such matters as the practical arrangements for consultation between them, the co-ordination of requests for information from the utility companies, the exchange of information, and the co-ordination of work on consumer-related issues. We also propose that the water consumer council and the drinking water inspectorate should be placed under a similar duty to agree and publish an MoU to cover co-operation between them on water quality issues and the handling of water quality complaints.

The councils' powers to access information will need a basis in statute. We intend to give the councils direct rights of access to the information they need from utilities so that unresolved customer complaints can be investigated. In addition, we propose that councils should receive copies of any monitoring returns that utility companies are required to send to the utility regulators to demonstrate compliance with codes of practice on complaints handling. This is intended to assist the councils in their task of tackling the causes of consumer complaints at source.

We propose that other types of information should be obtained by making a request to the relevant utility regulator, or to the drinking water inspectorate, where it cannot be obtained from the utility companies on a voluntary basis. Consistent with their existing functions, we intend to give the utility regulators and the drinking water inspectorate powers to obtain information from the utilities on behalf of the councils as well as for themselves, and we intend to make the councils bodies to whom they can disclose information. These bodies will be required to comply with reasonable requests from the councils for information, both information that they hold already or have generated themselves, and new information which needs to be obtained from the utility companies. Where a request is declined, these bodies will need to give reasons. There will be reciprocal obligations on the councils to provide information to the utility regulators or to the drinking water inspectorate on similar terms.

These are strong information-gathering powers which will ensure that the councils have access to the information they will need in order to play an influential and informed role within the regulatory system. The powers are consistent with the Government's vision of the councils as independent, effective consumer champions.

The Government wish to establish focused and professional consumer councils. The optimum number of council members may vary between the utility sectors, and over time. Accordingly, we propose that the legislation should not specify a minimum or a maximum number of council members. This will provide the necessary flexibility. Appointments to the councils and approval of their budgets will be a matter for the Government, thus ensuring their independence from the utility regulators. Their resources will be raised, wherever possible, through licence fees, and they will be required to operate in an accountable and transparent fashion.

The Government fully recognise the importance of the regional dimension in the provision of utility services, and recognise that some issues and concerns may be best addressed at a regional level. They also recognise that regional arrangements will need to be different in different sectors, depending on the structure of the industry.

We propose to give the telecoms and energy councils a duty to ensure that regional needs are addressed efficiently and effectively, and that their work is informed by an awareness of regional issues. To meet this duty, the telecoms and energy councils will be given flexible powers to establish regional offices where they need them, and to appoint regional committees or panels where these are needed to help address customer complaints and other issues. These powers will give the councils the flexibility to change their regional arrangements in response to market developments in their utility sectors. The councils will be required to obtain the consent of the Secretary of State for their regional arrangements and to consult the Secretary of State on the appointment of any regional chairmen. In addition, the national energy council will be required to maintain offices and an appropriate consumer committee or panel structure in Scotland and Wales. The national telecommunications council will be required to maintain similar arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In the water sector, the Government propose to take an approach which reflects the particularly strong regional dimension in water supply, and the forthcoming devolution of certain functions to the National Assembly for Wales. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions will therefore be given powers to determine the regional structure of the water consumer council (to include an office and consumer committee in Wales), and powers to appoint both the regional chairmen of committees operating in England, and members of the national council. The appointment of the chairman to the Welsh consumer committee will be made by the Welsh Assembly. The national council will make the other appointments in line with guidance issued by the Secretary of State in respect of English regional committees, and guidance issued by the Welsh Assembly in respect of the Welsh consumer committee. The guidance will be designed to ensure that the appointments adequately reflect local consumer interests. As for the other utility councils, it is intended that the regional organisation will operate as part of a single public body.

More generally, detailed operational matters are best left to the councils. The Government do not therefore wish to legislate on specific matters such as call centre arrangements, or on the detailed arrangements for handling complaints. These arrangements may need to change over time, and are not matters for legislation.

The Government wish to ensure that the work of all the councils and any regional or other specialist committees is professional, and that work on such committees is attractive to a wide cross-section of the community. To this end all the councils will be given powers to remunerate the members of any regional or other specialist committees where appropriate.

More generally, the councils may find it useful to establish operational links with other regulators such as the Environment Agency, the Health and Safety Executive and the Electricity Engineering Inspectorate, and with

consumer bodies such as local authority Trading Standards Offices, and Citizens' Advice Bureaux. We propose to give the councils powers to establish MoUs or other arrangements with these and other organisations where appropriate, to ensure the effective referral of consumer concerns to those who can best deal or act on them.

In the water sector, the Government also propose to improve the arrangements by which service standards are set. Standards can currently be set only by the Secretary of State in response to a specific proposition from the economic regulator. We believe that this is no longer appropriate in a sector where standards may need to be set for environmental and public health reasons beyond the scope of the economic regulator's functions. We propose, therefore, to extend the existing arrangements so that the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in respect of England, and the Welsh Assembly in respect of Wales, can initiate proposals for new or amended service standards, subject to public consultation. The new procedure would normally only be exercised by the Secretary of State and the Welsh Assembly in respect of standards raising environmental and public health issues. Where any new or amended standards had a significant financial effect, they would trigger existing provisions in the water companies' conditions of appointment that enable costs to be passed through.

Steps will be taken to ensure a smooth transition from the existing consumer bodies to the new councils, with the existing bodies being wound up when the transition has been achieved. This will ensure that consumer interests are effectively addressed during the interim, and that the councils can operate effectively from the moment they take over.

Government will not be able to achieve the results they want without high quality staff. Already, within existing organisations, there are staff who are doing some of the things the consumer councils will be doing, and doing it well. Steps will need to be taken to ensure that full use is made of this existing expertise. Staff will need to be transferred or seconded to the councils. Staffing arrangements will be a matter for detailed discussion between the staff concerned, the utility regulators, the Gas Consumers' Council (in respect of the energy council), and any relevant unions.

These proposals, taken together, will ensure that consumers have the strong and independent voice they need, and thereby help to ensure that the regulatory regime is able to respond promptly and efficiently to meet their needs.

I am placing a list of the organisations and individuals who responded to the consultation paper, excluding those who requested confidentiality, in the Library of the House.

Chemical Weapons Act 1996

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the operation of the Chemical Weapons Act 1996. [81140]

Dr. Howells: In accordance with the Act, I have placed a report on its implementation during 1998 in the Libraries of both Houses.

Gas Power Station, Baglan Bay

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce his decision on the notification under section 14(1) of the Energy Act 1976 by the Baglan Cogeneration Company to use natural gas as the fuel at a proposed combined cycle gas turbine power station at Baglan Bay in South West Wales. [81141]

Mr. Byers: I announced on Wednesday 7 April my conclusion that the potential benefits of a proposed new 500 Megawatt gas-fired power station at Baglan Bay, South Wales, particularly in terms of local employment and economic regeneration, are such that I have decided not to use my powers under section 14(3) of the Energy Act 1976 to halt or defer this project.

Copies of the Press Notice and decision letter have been placed in the Library of the House. The general policy on power station consents is set out in the Government's October 1998 Energy White Paper and remains in force.

HEALTH

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made with the review of hospital discharge procedures; and if he will make a statement. [80458]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* We expect to be able to go out to consultation in the summer on a draft of the revised guidance with a view to issuing final revised guidanee before the end of 1999.

Brumby Hospital, Scunthorpe

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reach a decision regarding the future of Brumby Hospital, Scunthorpe. [80283]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* A decision on the proposal to relocate Inpatient and Day Hospital Services from Brumby Hospital to Scunthorpe and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust will be made shortly, once Ministers have had the opportunity to consider all relevant factors. Ministers will only approve changes which result in improved health services for local people.

Lamotrigine

Mr. Lock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *656–57*, on Lamotrigine, if he will list for each further evaluation undertaken or commissioned by the Medicines Control Agency in respect of Lamotrigine, *(a)* the name of the individual body who was instructed to carry out the further research, *(b)* the terms of reference of the research, *(c)* the cost of the research and *(d)* when and where the results of the research were or are planned to be published. [80229]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The safety of all marketed medicines is continually monitored by the Medicines Control Agency through the Yellow Card Scheme which collects reports of suspected adverse reactions. Lamotrigine is closely monitored under the Black Triangle Scheme, by which new drugs are

intensively monitored for the first few years of marketing until their safety profile is established. Marketing Authorisation holders are responsible for providing the Medicines Control Agency with all information relating to the safety of their drugs. In addition, owing to the issue of serious skin reactions associated with Lamotrigine, the safety of Lamotrigine is reviewed regularly at a European level at the Pharmacovigilance Working Party of the Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products. Information about the safety of Lamotrigine in general, and skin reactions in particular, were published in the Medicines Control Agency/Committee on Safety of Medicines drug safety bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in February 1993, October 1996 and May 1997. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The Medicines Control Agency has not commissioned any research in respect of Lamotrigine.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80415]

Ms Jowell: My responsibilities are to ensure that, within the context of the Government's overall policy on the European Union, Community activities in the field of public health add value and address objectives which cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States acting alone. The coming into force of the Amsterdam Treaty will not alter those responsibilities. It will have minimal impact directly on the Department and its staffing. There will be an increased role for the European Parliament following amendments to Article 129 (renumbered Article 152) of the Treaty. These provide for measures to be adopted, through the co-decision procedure, to set high standards of quality and safety of organs and substances of human origin, blood and blood derivatives and in the veterinary and phytosanitary fields which have as their direct objective the protection of human health.

Biggleswade and Steppingly Hospitals

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the proposed closure of Biggleswade and Steppingly hospitals from *(a)* health professionals and *(b)* others. [80579]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* We have received written representations from my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) and from Councillor Robin Younger of Bedfordshire County Council.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the surveys commissioned by the area health authority into the viability of Biggleswade and Steppingly Hospitals. [80578]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The documents commissioned by Bedfordshire Health Authority into the viability of Biggleswade and Steppingly Hospitals will be placed in the Library.

Intensive Care (Hampshire)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision of intensive care beds there is in the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority area; and what estimate he has made of the changes in each of the next five years. [80571]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Intensive care provision in Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority is at Portsmouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust. Results from a pilot census indicated that on 1 December 1998, Portsmouth NHS Trust had 10 general intensive care beds. A more reliable figure from the first full census of 31 March 1999 is expected to be available in May. Both figures give a snapshot on the census day and the actual number of intensive care beds on another day may be different.

In addition, there are up to a maximum of four general intensive care bed spaces based at the Royal Hospital Haslar.

The health authority are currently considering further provision of health services in the area following the proposed closure of the Royal Hospital Haslar in Gosport.

Neurological Conditions

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the extent to which purchasers develop care pathways for patients with neurological conditions. [80595]

Mr. Hutton: Service agreements should be the basis for continuing dialogue between all those involved in the care pathway to ensure that arrangements are developing as planned and that any problems are addressed in good time. Arrangements for monitoring and review will also need to be built in. If a problem arises, the emphasis in the first instance will be on a local resolution.

Consideration will be given to reviewing the extent to which purchasers develop care pathways for patients with neurological conditions if this proves necessary.

Clinical Terms Version 3

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the report of the independent evaluation of Clinical Terms Version 3 (the Read Codes); and if he will make a statement. [81073]

Mr. Denham: The evaluation of Clinical Terms Version 3 (the Read Codes) is being carried out in three stages. The first stage has now been completed and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The second stage of the Evaluation is currently underway and will produce a methodology for long term evaluation of the Clinical Terminology in live use in the National Health Service. This methodology will then be used in stage three of the evaluation, which will involve continuous evaluation of the effective use of Clinical Terminologies in the NHS.

As a result of recommendations made in the report the NHS Executive intends to mandate the use of a coded clinical terminology (currently Clinical Terms Version 3) and has entered into an Agreement with the College of American Pathologists to create a new international standard which combines CAP's SNOMED™ with the Clinical Terms Version 3 (Read Codes).

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of expenditure to date by the NHS to resolve the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [79726]

Mr. Denham: An analysis of quarterly monitoring returns for the period ended 31 December 1998, the latest available, shows the estimated total cost to be approximately £321 million. Further estimates will become available as future returns are made.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the NHS has made to limit the risks to the provision of NHS services as a consequence of the year 2000 computer problem; and if he will make a statement. [79727]

Mr. Denham: There is a comprehensive programme for National Health Service Year 2000 preparations that reports progress via my right hon. Friend the President of the Council's quarterly statements to Parliament. The programme ensures that NHS organisations minimise the risks to the provisions of NHS services as a consequence of the year 2000 problem through the provision of guidance, attention to external suppliers, frequent monitoring of progress, independent assessment, performance management and disclosure of progress.

Task Forces and Policy Reviews

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of (1) task forces and (2) policy reviews established by his Department since May 1997 which *(a)* had external members recruited by way of public advertisement, and details of any person so appointed and *(b)* engaged in public consultation exercises, and the form that these took. [74462]

Ms Jowell: Most task forces and reviews are short-term bodies established to give thorough consideration to important and difficult issues. External members are invited to sit on some reviews and task forces because they are able to contribute specific experience and expertise. In such cases, public advertising would be inappropriate and disproportionate.

Since 1 October 1998, appointments to those task forces which qualify for classification as advisory non-departmental public bodies have come within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

It is rare for task forces and reviews to engage in public consultation exercises. Where, exceptionally, comments from the public or representative organisations are sought, a consultation document might be published inviting a response, as in the Review of the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Millennium Dome (Environmental Policy)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which non-governmental organisations have been consulted in respect of environmental aspects of the Millennium Experience; what plans there are to include exhibitions on British energy saving and environmental technologies; and if he will list the environmental issues which have been taken into account in the planning, construction and operation of the Dome. [70662]

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to use renewable energy sources to power the Millennium Dome. [75685]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) recognises the unique opportunity afforded by the Millennium Experience project to adopt positive environmental policies across all aspects of the project, including planning; construction; and operation. NMEC is doing so wherever possible, recognising the time and budgetary constraints within which it is operating. Underpinning NMEC's operation is its Environmental Plan (including targets and objectives) which has been presented to non-governmental organisations, and was approved by Greenwich Council in mid-1998. The Environmental Plan is regularly reviewed. The Plan is sent to all companies tendering for works, goods and services and they are required to include in their bids, statements of their own environmental polices.

A number of innovative environmental initiatives are already in progress on site. Following discussions with the NMEC, Thames Water is installing a state-of-the-art grey water recycling scheme at the Dome. During the year of operation, the NMEC will adopt a waste management strategy based on the concepts of waste reduction, re-use, recycling and efficient removal from the site, providing opportunities for innovative demonstration environmental projects. NMEC is also investigating supply strategies that will minimise the quantity of packaging coming onto the site and facilities to allow separation of those major waste streams that are generated in order that they can be processed or recycled efficiently. There is daily monitoring of dust and noise levels and robust systems are in place to ensure immediate response should any problems arise. Two firms of independent environmental consultants have reviewed the environmental health and safety and the environmental integrity of the site.

The Dome structure was conceived and developed as an energy and resource efficient means of housing a range of exhibits and attractions appropriate to the conditions of the Greenwich peninsula site. The Dome does not provide a conventionally controlled environment; it is not air-conditioned, and heating and cooling provisions have been minimised to reflect the fact that visitors will be wearing clothing appropriate to outdoor conditions. In addition, the translucency of the Dome cladding material allows the interior to be naturally lit for much of the year. It is inevitable that operating a large scale visitor attraction requires a significant quantity of power, but NMEC will seek to minimise this requirement wherever it is practicable to do so.

In the early stages of the development of the National zone, in which there will be a significant focus on environmental matters, meetings were held with representatives from the Council of Rural England, Greenpeace, and the Natural Foresight Panel (DTI). The Environment Agency has ongoing liaison with the NMEC in light of its statutory role and responsibilities and in the light of its work in regenerating Thames River bank areas adjacent to the Dome site. In this latter respect the Dome has provided the catalyst for the creation of a new river bank ecology and ecological terrace as well as for regeneration of the Peninsula as a whole. The NMEC also has ongoing contacts with non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace.

The National zone will explore the UK's relationship with the environment and its structure will optimise use of environmentally positive materials and techniques. The Local zone, unveiled on BBC Television's Blue Peter programme earlier this year, will be one of the largest recycled cardboard structures in the world. Children across the UK have been invited to participate in the creation of the zone. Other exhibit zones and areas within the Dome will also incorporate and address issues which have an environmental aspect.

Millennium Dome (School Visits)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment regarding terms and conditions for teachers accompanying groups of pupils visiting the Millennium Dome. [78165]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 22 March 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is in consultation with the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) as part of the process of developing management plans for school and education visits. The procedures which the NMEC will adopt and operate will be based on established procedures for other visitor attractions. The ratio of children to teachers will be one adult to every six pupils in years 1 to 3 and special needs groups; one adult to every ten pupils in years 4 to 6; and one adult to every fifteen pupils in years 7 and above. Adults accompanying children in these groups will be admitted to the Dome free of charge.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on the New Millennium Experience Company's budget for the Dome of granting free access to school parties; [78178]

(2) what estimate he has made of the effect on overall visitor numbers to the Dome of the policy of granting free access to school parties. [77999]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 22 March 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) ticketing strategy provides for up to one million free admissions for school children on the Education Tours Scheme. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced details of this scheme in the House on 17 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 1117. Copies of the NMEC's press release detailing the operation of the scheme have been placed in the Libraries of the House. Over and above this scheme, schools will be able to take advantage of the education visits discounted group rates.

The NMEC remains confident that its forecast of 12 million visits remains achievable and that the children taking part in the Education Tour Scheme can be accommodated within that forecast. The Millennium Experience project remains within its £758 cash budget taking into account the free school admissions provision.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment regarding the cost of overnight accommodation for parties of school children and teachers visiting the Millennium Dome. [78167]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 22 March 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is not responsible for accommodation arrangements for visitors to the Millennium Experience at Greenwich. However, the NMEC is in discussion with the travel trade to encourage and facilitate attractive packages for those requiring overnight accommodation. For school children in organised groups, the NMEC has instigated a range of options for overnight accommodation with a number of youth hostels and higher education institutions who have expressed interest in providing safe, clean and affordable accommodation for school groups.

Millennium Dome (Transport)

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what negotiations the New Millennium Experience Company has had with London Transport regarding free or discounted tube or bus travel to the Millennium Dome. [78888]

Janet Anderson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is in constructive discussion with London Transport about a special Millennium travel ticket which will provide a good deal for visitors to the Dome. Details are currently being negotiated with all interested parties.

Millennium Dome (British Engineering)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has for exhibits in the Millennium Dome which promote public understanding of British engineering. [77856]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 March 1999]:* The Millennium Dome itself, and the individual exhibits within it, are striking examples of the capabilities and imagination of British designers, architects and engineers. Some elements of the exhibits will also address and reflect issues within the engineering field. In addition, the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is working with the Design Council to accommodate a number of its innovative Millennium Products within the Dome. Aspects of the NMEC's school curriculum resource packs (which are issued to every school in the UK) deal with a range of construction and engineering issues involved in the building of the Dome.

Greenwich Millennium Celebrations

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what discussions he has had with *(a)* Bexley and Greenwich Health Authority

and *(b)* Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust regarding the millennium celebrations; and if he will make a statement; [79315]

(2) what assessment he has made of the need for health care services in Greenwich arising from the millennium celebrations; and if he will make a statement; [79316]

(3) what assessment he has made of the likely demand for emergency ambulance services arising from the millennium celebrations; and if he will make a statement. [79317]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answers given by the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), on 29 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *498–99*. The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has been in discussion for over twelve months with Bexley and Greenwich Health Authority, Greenwich Healthcare Trust and the London Ambulance Service about health and emergency planning issues. The NMEC is also represented on the Health Authority Millennium Co-ordinating Group which is, among other things, working with the NMEC on issues to do with health care on the Dome site. The London Ambulance Service is represented on all these forums and attends a monthly meeting with all the emergency services, the NMEC and others. The NMEC also participate in the Safety Advisory Group established by the London Borough of Greenwich.

Sports Funding

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received regarding the establishment of a national sports endowment fund, from Lottery money, for sports funding. [79200]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* I have received a number of representations on this matter from Members of Parliament and others.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

European Community Documents

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Council if she will list for each document of the European Community referred by the Select Committee on European Legislation to a European Standing Committee in Session 1997–98, *(a)* the date of referral, *(b)* the topic and numbers of the document, including the dates of (i) consideration in the Committee, (ii) subsequent resolution of the House and (iii) consideration, and substantive agreement in the Council of Ministers and *(c)* any consequential United Kingdom legislation arising therefrom. [79543]

Mrs. Beckett: The information requested for *(a)* and *(b)*(i) and *(b)*(ii) is contained in the document "European Community Documents, Session 1997–98", which was published on 19 November 1998 and is available in the Library of the House.

I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly on the other information requested.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Media Allegations (Rebuttals)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list *(a)* those units in her Department and *(b)* the number of departmental staff which are concerned with preparing rebuttals of allegations in the media; and what is (i) the total cost of their work, including salaries, and (ii) the number of rebuttals issued since May 1997. [71846]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* The Northern Ireland Information Service does not have a specialist rebuttal unit. It is part of the day-to-day responsibilities of all information officers to identify and seek to correct wherever possible misleading or inaccurate information.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what environmental appraisals of policy her Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79617]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The available information is currently being collected by each Department to meet the Environmental Audit Committee's request for information on environmental appraisals as part of its second inquiry into the Greening Government Initiative.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of prosecutions for benefit fraud were prosecuted under the Theft Acts in each year since 1992–93. [79794]

Mr. Timms: Questions on Benefits Agency operational matters are the responsibility of its Chief Executive, Peter Mathison. He will write to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Frank Field, dated 13 April 1999:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what proportion of prosecutions for benefit fraud were prosecuted under the Theft Acts in each year since 1992–3.

The figures are not available for prosecutions for the years 1992 to 1995.

In 1995/6 the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service together prosecuted a total of 13,972 cases. Of these, 320 cases were classed as Theft Act or Serious Fraud, and a further 420 were prosecuted by Organised Fraud teams. Specific figures for total prosecutions under the Theft Act were not compiled.

I am able to give you the figures, as requested, for the financial year's 1996/7, 1997/8, and 1998/9. They are included in the attached table. For the year 1998/99, for the first time, we have prosecuted under the Theft Act where the amount of benefit involved is less than £5,000. This resulted in a further 2,169 prosecutions.

I hope that this is helpful.

Prosecutions for benefit fraud

	Theft Act prosecutions	*Total prosecutions*	*Percentage*
1996–97	750	11,770	6.4
1997–98	835	12,074	6.9
1998–99	[1][2]3,441	8,268	41.6

[1] Figures are as at 28 February 1999
[2] Includes prosecutions for the first time where the amount of benefit involved is less than £5,000

Notes:
Figures provided by BA Security
Figures are provisional and subject to change

Benefits Agency Medical Service

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the arrangements made by Sema/Nestor for recruitment under contract of sessional doctors to provide services under the Benefits Agency Medical Service contract. [80282]

Mr. Bayley: The administration of medical services for the Benefits Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, Peter Mathison. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Philip Hammond, dated 13 April 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what assessment he has made of the arrangements made by Sema/Nestor for recruitment under contract of sessional doctors to provide services under the Benefits Agency Medical Services contract.

Sema Group was awarded the contract for the provision of medical services for the Benefits Agency on 1 September 1998. The arrangements they have made have been very successful. Currently a pool of 2,951 doctors are available to provide medical examinations, 2,529 of whom have signed formal contracts.

When Sema became responsible for the medical service they identified a small number of locations where the Agency was experiencing difficulties in recruiting doctors. The pool of doctors currently available has enabled them to steadily improve their performance against service levels in key benefits. In addition, other methods such as moving doctors voluntarily are being employed to cover any shortfalls. Sema Group now has a sufficient number of doctors to enable them to deliver performance against agreed service levels.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Tariff Income Schedule

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of income support over the age of 60 years are affected by the tariff income schedule regime; and what reduction of expenditure on income support is achieved by the schedule. [80505]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

Income support recipients aged over 60 years old with tariff income taken into account, average amount taken into account and estimated expenditure savings, 1997–98

Period	*Numbers with tariff income taken into account*	*Average weekly amount (£)*	*Estimated expenditure savings (£)*
May 1997	78,000	6.25	6,316,000
August 1997	78,000	6.31	6,430,000
November 1997	83,000	6.34	6,838,000
February 1998	89,000	6.92	7,961,000
All quarters (97–98)			27,545,000

Notes:
1. The estimate represents a four quarter total taken from the Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiries for May 1997 to February 1998. The quarterly inquiries are based on a 5 per cent. sample of all Income Support cases and as such are subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand and may not sum owing to rounding.
3. Reduced expenditure arising from the tariff income schedule regime has been estimated by using the average amount taken into account for tariff income cases during each quarter.

Source:
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Inquiries, May 1997-February 1998.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the numbers of potential claimants of income support who are prevented from qualifying for income support as a result of the tariff income schedule regime. [80506]

Angela Eagle: This information is not currently available. Estimates of the number of potential claimants prevented from qualifying for Income Support as a result of the tariff income regime are based on the data used to produce the published estimates of take-up of income related benefits. These estimates are currently being revised following the discovery in December of an error, the effect of which was to understate income brought to account, and will be republished in May.

Savings Threshold

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the level of savings which requires his Department to assume an income of £1 for every £250 above that limit, when calculating benefits; and if he will make a statement. [80666]

Angela Eagle: The assumption of notional (tariff) income of £1 for every £250 of capital above £3,000 reflects an expectation that people with more substantial savings can make some contribution towards their living expenses from those savings. This formula, which does not represent any assumed rate of interest, avoids the many practical difficulties that would arise if actual income were taken into account. However, we continue to review the benefit rules as part of our commitment to modernise the Social Security system.

In particular, we are determined to help the poorest pensioners and are concerned about those who miss out on the Minimum Income Guarantee because of modest savings. We have made it clear in the Pensions Green Paper (cm 4179) that we want to look at options for changing the rules on the treatment of voluntary saving to

better reward those who have saved for their retirement, and intend to bring forward proposals later in this Parliament.

Pensions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the size and cost of the rebates required to implement the Partnership for Pensions proposals. [80509]

Mr. Timms: The proposals for Stakeholder Pensions and the State Second Pension will impact on the National Insurance rebate payable to those contracted-out of the State scheme. For Stakeholder Pensions, we will first need to look at the charging structure before determining the appropriate levels of National Insurance rebates. We expect to consult with the Government Actuary's Department later in the year and would aim to lay any Rebate Orders before 6 April 2000, a year before the planned introduction of Stakeholder Pensions in April 2001.

The scheduled introduction of the State Second Pension in April 2002 will coincide with the introduction of any new rebates arising from the next full review that will take place during the 2000–01 tax year. The review will include full consultation, and will set out the level of rebate considered appropriate to compensate for the new State benefits forgone.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he plans to require providers of stakeholder pensions to have a duty to offer advice with utmost good faith to potential customers; [80507]

(2) if he plans to require his Department *(a)* to offer advice, *(b)* to pay for independent advice and *(c)* to provide a channel to authorised independent advice, on the switch between the state second pension and the stakeholder pension proposed in his Partnership for Pensions. [80508]

Mr. Timms: The arrangements for the provision of information and advice to those considering joining stakeholder pension schemes are subject to further consultation. Further details will be set out in due course.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the proportion of (i) pensioner couples, (ii) single male pensioners, (iii) single female pensioners and (iv) pensioners in total aged *(a)* 65 to 69, *(b)* 70 to 74, *(c)* 75 to 79 and *(d)* 80 years or above who are in receipt of income from an occupational pension; and if he will list for each group the mean and median amounts received. [80422]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the tables.

The methodology used is consistent with The Pensioners' Incomes Series 1996–97. Estimates of the proportions in receipt of occupational pension income should be regarded as provisional. This is because they are based partly on data extrapolated from the Government Actuary's Department Surveys of Occupational Pensions, which are published approximately every five years, with the most recent surveys relating to 1991. Estimates are likely to be revised when the latest survey is published.

Estimates of mean and median amounts can be regarded as final.

Proportion of pensioners in receipt of income from an occupational pension

Percentage

	Age band			
	65 to 69	*70 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80 or above*
Pensioner couples	77	78	75	65
Single male pensioners	54	58	61	56
Single female pensioners	69	65	61	51
All pensioner units	70	70	66	55

Mean amount of occupational pension income for those in receipt—July 1996 prices

£ per week

	Age band			
	65 to 69	*70 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80 or above*
Pensioner couples	132	112	98	87
Single male pensioners	88	96	63	63
Single female pensioners	63	58	51	44
All pensioner units	109	92	74	61

Median amount of occupational pension income for those in receipt—July 1996 prices

£ per week

	Age band			
	65 to 69	*70 to 74*	*75 to 79*	*80 or above*
Pensioner couples	87	67	52	50
Single male pensioners	59	55	37	39
Single female pensioners	37	34	29	27
All pensioner units	66	52	39	32

Notes:

1. Estimates of the proportion of pensioner units in receipt of occupational pension income are based upon data from the Family Resources Survey 1996–97, controlled to a number of individual recipients which is extrapolated from the Surveys of Occupational Pensions of the Government Actuary's Department.
2. Estimates of the proportions with occupational pension income should be treated as provisional.
3. Pensioner units are defined as single people above State pension age (60 and over for women, 65 and over for men) and couples (married or cohabiting) where the man is over State pension age.
4. Pensioner couples have been allocated to age bands according to the age of the man.
5. The occupational pension income category includes income received by widows on the basis of their late spouse's contributions to an occupational pension scheme.

Sources:

Family Resources Survey 1996–97, Government Actuary's Department Surveys of Occupational Pensions 1991.

Bereavement Allowance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* widowers and *(b)* widows he expects to be entitled to the bereavement payment in (i) the first full year of implementation and (ii) 2020. [80656]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* It is estimated that around 20,000 widowers and around 40,000 widows will be entitled to the Bereavement Payment in the first full year of implementation and in 2020, following equalisation of State Pension age at 65.

It is not possible to provide exact long-term estimates and therefore estimates for 2020 should be regarded as illustrative.

Note:

Figures have been supplied by the Government Actuary's Department. They are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and are subject to a wide range of uncertainty.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated increase in the number of income support claimants as a result of the replacement of the widows pension by the bereavement allowance in (i) the first full year of implementation and (ii) 2020. [80658]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

In order to provide some idea of the scale of the likely effect, the following figures provide indicative estimates of the average increase in the number of Income Support claimants as a result of the proposed changes to Widows Pension. Estimates for 2020 should be regarded as illustrative.

In the first full year, the increase in the number of Income Support recipients is estimated to be less than 5,000. It is estimated that this could rise to around 30,000 by 2020.

Notes:

1. Estimates assume that a constant proportion of those affected by the proposed changes to Bereavement Benefits move on or off Income Support. Therefore the estimates for 2020 should be regarded as illustrative.

2. Estimates use information from the 1995-6 Family Resources Survey, the May 1996 Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry and forecasts from the Government Actuary's Department concerning the number of men and women affected by the proposed changes.

3. Figure rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* widowers and *(b)* widows he expects to be entitled to bereavement allowance in (i) the first full year of implementation and (ii) 2020. [80655]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* It is estimated that around 10,000 widowers will be entitled to Bereavement Allowance from the first full year of implementation up to 2020. It is estimated that around 10,000 widows will be entitled to Bereavement Allowance in the first full year of implementation, increasing to around 20,000 by 2020 following equalisation of State Pension age at 65.

It is not possible to provide exact long-term estimates and therefore estimates for 2020 should be regarded as illustrative.

Notes:

1. Figures have been supplied by the Government Actuary's Department. They are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and are subject to a wide range of uncertainty.

2. Figures represent the average number of cases throughout the year. Hence the first full year is the second financial year following implementation.

Widowed Parents Allowance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* widowers and *(b)* widows he expects to be entitled to widowed parents allowance in (i) the first full year of implementation and (ii) 2020. [80652]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Existing widowed fathers will be able to claim Widowed Parent's Allowance from the date the new scheme is implemented. We estimate that around 20,000 widowers will be entitled to Widowed Parent's Allowance in each year up to 2020.

We estimate that around 10,000 new widows will be entitled to Widowed Parent's Allowance in the full first year of implementation, building up to around 30,000 by 2020. Existing widowed mothers will continue to receive Widowed Mother's Allowance.

It is not possible to provide exact long-term estimates and therefore estimates for 2020 should be regarded as illustrative.

Notes:

1. Figures have been supplied by the Government Actuary's Department. They are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and are subject to a wide range of uncertainty.

2. Figures represent the average number of cases throughout the year. Hence, the first full year is the second financial year following implementation.

Noise Exposure

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the need to extend to new industries arrangements for monitoring for noise exposure. [80028]

Mr. Meale: I have been asked to reply.

The Noise at Work Regulations 1989, which require employers to make arrangements to assess their employees' exposure to loud noise at work, apply to all industries, including new industries, with the exception of ships at sea and aircraft taxiing or in flight.

SCOTLAND

Class Sizes

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many primary school classes *(a)* had over 30 pupils in May 1997 and *(b)* currently have over 30 pupils.

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* The information requested for May 1997 is not centrally available. The most recent figures are from the schools census carried out in September 1997 when 2,679 publicly funded primary school classes had more than 30 pupils. Figures for 1998 are not available yet.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament. [74554]

Sustainable Development

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) to whom the document, "Down to Earth—a Scottish Perspective on Sustainable Development", was distributed; and how it was distributed; [75821]

(2) how many copies of "Down to Earth—a Scottish Perspective on Sustainable Development", were printed; [75822]

(3) what was the total cost, including research and departmental time, for producing and publishing "Down to Earth—a Scottish Perspective on Sustainable Development". [75823]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* "Down to Earth" was published on 3 February 1999 as part of our on-going programme to deliver our commitment to place sustainable development at the heart of policy making. We first indicated our intention to produce a Sustainable Action Plan for Scotland in September 1997. "Down to Earth" brought together work on sustainable development being undertaken in many parts of the Scottish Office and was co-ordinated by departmental staff as part of their normal duties. 4,000 copies were printed and a large proportion of these have been distributed by the Scottish Office to a wide range of interested organisations and individuals in Scotland and beyond. Copies of the publication are available upon request and the full text has been placed on the internet. The cost of production and publishing was £20,283.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Home Department Reviews and Inquiries

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many reviews and inquiries have been announced on areas within the responsibility of the Scottish Home Department since 1 May 1997; what is the completion date or expected completion date in each case; and if he will make a statement. [80041]

Mr. McLeish: The following reviews and inquiries have been undertaken by the Scottish Office Home Department:

Review/Inquiry	*Completion date/ Expected completion date*
Inquiry into the handling by Grampian Police of the Murder of Scott Greg Simpson	April 1998
Review of the Use of Custody for Women Offenders in Scotland	May 1998
Review of the Treatment of Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses	November 1998
Review of Scottish Crime Prevention Council	March 1999
Review of Child Protection Committees	August 1999
Review of Services for People with Learning Difficulties	December 1999
Review of National Curriculum for Children's Panel Member Training	December 1999
Review of Police Force and Fire Brigade Structures	March 2000
Review of the Sentencing and Treatment of Serious Violent and Sexual Offenders	mid 2000
SCRA Time Intervals Working Group—reviewing the processing of cases referred to the Children's Hearings System	On-going monitoring and review role

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the issues on which the Government have undertaken advertising campaigns in Scotland since they came into office; and how much they have spent on each campaign. [80054]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The details are as follows:

Year/Campaign	*Spend (£)*
1997–98	
Bogus Callers	37,000
Childrens Hearings	176,250
Continence Campaign	2,900
Daily Record Health Supplement (NHS Green Paper)	79,700
Electoral Registration	70,000
Fire Prevention	323,800
Food Safety	21,100
Historic Scotland	352,000
Organ Donors	41,300
Referendum Reminder	420,000
Road Safety	383,300
Severe Weather	46,000
1998–99	
Children's Panels	112,300
Daily Record Health Supplement (NHS White Paper)	77,000
Democratising Scotland	248,500
Domestic Violence	630,700
Electoral Registration	41,000
Fire Prevention	225,000
Food Safety	21,150
Fostering	97,400
Further Education	70,000
Historic Scotland	410,000
Local Government Commission	78,000
Nursing Recruitment	258,300
Pharmacy Point of Dispensing	53,200
Police Graduate Recruitment	9,500
Scottish Parliament Campaign	1,785,000
Teacher Recruitment	4,200

WALES

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met members of the aerospace industry in Wales to discuss future prospects in the industry; and if he will make a statement. [79843]

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met representatives of the aerospace industry when he visited GE Aircraft Engine Services Ltd. at Nantgarw on 16 February, and I last met representatives when I visited British Airways Maintenance Cardiff on 1 February.

Steel Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the prospects for the steel industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [79847]

Mr. Hain: The Welsh steel industry is among the most competitive in the world. However, like others, it is experiencing very difficult trading conditions. The industry is therefore taking action to maintain its competitiveness, such as the introduction of new technology and team working. For example, British Steel has recently completed a £121 million investment in a new continuous annealing process line at Port Talbot, which represents the biggest single investment in the industry since privatisation.

The Government are also supporting initiatives aimed at improving the industry's competitiveness. We have provided grant support through the UK Steel Association and Steel Training Ltd. for a range of projects involving benchmarking, education and training.

Assisted Area Status

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the importance of assisted area status in the decisions of (i) United Kingdom and (ii) overseas companies concerning location and investment; and if he will make a statement. [79845]

Mr. Hain: The Welsh Office, together with the Department for Trade and Industry and the Scottish Office, have jointly commissioned "Arup Economics and Planning" to undertake an evaluation of Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) between 1991 and 1995. Amongst other things, it will look at the influence of RSA on investment decisions. The report is expected to be ready towards the middle of this year. Previous evaluations of RSA suggest that up to a fifth of RSA funded projects would have located outside the UK Assisted Areas in the absence of RSA.

Teachers

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional resources are to be made available to him to implement the Government's proposals for the future of the teaching profession. [80441]

Mr. Hain: We announced in December last year that education and training in Wales will receive a total of £844 million extra over the next three years. This includes resources for the new pay and performance management arrangements proposed in the Green Paper on the future of the teaching profession in Wales. The costs of these will be over and above the cost of normal pay increases which have been taken into account in plans for the local government revenue settlements for 2000–01 and 2001–02.

Decisions on education funding for 2000–01 onwards will be a matter for the National Assembly.

National Assembly (Salaries)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that future percentage changes in the level of the salaries of members of the National Assembly will be linked to changes in the level of *(a)* the national minimum wage and *(b)* the basic state pension. [80587]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* This will be a matter for the National Assembly to determine. The Review Body on Senior Salaries has recommended that the salaries of Members of the National Assembly for Wales be uprated each year in line with Senior Civil Service pay, specifically by the same percentage as the average of the movements in the mid-points of the nine Senior Civil Service pay bands below Permanent Secretary.

River Wye Navigation

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he plans to publish the report of the Inquiry into Navigation on the River Wye; and if he will make a statement. [80263]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Exchanges of correspondence are presently taking place between the Environment Agency, the applicants for the Wye Navigation Order, and an objector who has made post inquiry representations. This, together with the complexities involved in considering this case, means that the report is unlikely to be published prior to the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each (i) the likely effect on departmental staffing, (ii) the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and (iii) the relevant sections of that Treaty and the consolidated treaties of European Union and European Community. [80403]

Mr. Hain: The Treaty of Amsterdam is not expected to add to the range of policy areas for which the Welsh Office is responsible. We recognise, however, the need to implement the provisions of the Treaty so far as they relate to current areas of responsibility, the majority of which will transfer to the Welsh Assembly from 1 July 1999.

Mental Health

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the total NHS budget in Wales was allocated to mental health services in each of the last three years. [80194]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The figures are as follows:

1996–97: 4.7 per cent.

1997–98: 3.4 per cent.

1998–99: 3.3 per cent.

These figures represent the funds specifically allocated from within the NHS Total to mental health services which includes mental illness and learning disability services. In 1997–98, some £30 million spent on local

authority strategies (representing 1.3 per cent. of the NHS Total) was transferred recurrently into the local authority revenue settlement. In addition to these amounts, Health Authorities will commission mental health services from within their discretionary funding allocations.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of inequalities in mental health treatment affecting members of the (i) black and (ii) other ethnic minority communities in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [80189]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: There has been no specific assessment and there is some doubt as to whether the numbers of ethnic minority mental health patients in Wales gives a sufficient base for robust findings. We shall consider the needs of ethnic minority patients when drawing our plans for future Strategies on both child and adolescent and adult mental health services.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the rates of *(a)* schizophrenia and *(b)* depression among (i) Afro-Caribbeans and (ii) the population other than Afro-Caribbeans in Wales. [80190]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Reliable data are not available centrally on the ethnic group of patients treated in Wales. It is not sufficiently complete and consistently coded to be used for assessing differences between incident rates across ethnic groups. There is also doubt as to whether the numbers of ethnic minority mental health patients in Wales gives a sufficient base for robust findings.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many mental health patients were treated on the NHS in Wales over the last five years. [80191]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The available data, held centrally, are given in the following table. They do not, however, represent the numbers of individuals treated by the NHS over this period as one person could be included in more than one category or be discharged more than once from an NHS hospital during a year.

Mental illness	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
NHS hospitals:					
In-patient cases	17,033	18,182	18,376	17,841	17,588
Out-patient first attendances	—	18,552	18,624	18,545	21,589
NHS day hospitals—first attendances	5,670	7,127	4,846	5,705	5,580
Persons seen by community psychiatric nurses	24,230	26,419	26,801	32,681	33,932

— Not available
First contacts in the financial year

Following the transfer of functions this will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Wind Turbines

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the reasons for his decision to approve six additional wind turbines at Cemmaes B; and if he will make a statement. [80452]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The reasons for the decision are set out in the Welsh Office letter of 16 March 1999, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library. Once a decision has issued it is final; in these circumstances it would not be appropriate for further comment to be made on the merits of the decision or the reasons for it.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

New and Renewable Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the impact in Wales of the proposals in the Government's consultation paper, "New and Renewable Energy—Prospects for the 21st Century". [80242]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Government intend working towards a target of renewable energy providing 10 per cent. of UK electricity supplies, cost effectively, as soon as possible. We hope to achieve this by 2010.

The review document seeks views on a number of issues to enable the Government to frame future policies to meet their objectives of supporting renewables while they are reaching market prices and considers both the costs and benefits of moving towards greater use of renewables. In particular, the paper looks at options for a revised Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) in the competitive energy markets of the future.

The paper identifies key issues and challenges which the Government and industry would need to pursue.

Wales already has rich reserves of renewable energy resources, especially wind and biomass. It is important, in terms of generating jobs and developing future industries, that it continues to build on this.

I would encourage all interested parties in Wales to submit their views on the proposals so that they can play their part in framing future renewable energy policy.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the planning appeals in Wales since May 1997, in regard to which the Secretary of State for Wales has overturned the recommendation of the inspector; and if he will he make a statement. [80493]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: There have been no planning appeals in Wales under Section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, decided since May 1997, where the inspector's recommendation has been

overturned. On two occasions since May 1997 the recommendations of inspectors on applications called in for determination under Section 77 of the 1990 Act have been overturned.

These were:

an application for a detached dwelling at Trefil, Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent where the application was refused contrary to the recommendation of the inspector

an application for six wind turbine generators at Cemmaes Wind farm, Mynydd y Cemmaes, Machynlleth, Powys where planning permission was granted for six turbines contrary to the recommendation of the inspector that only four be allowed.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Supermarkets (Business Rate)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to review *(a)* the level of business rate which is paid by supermarkets in Wales and *(b)* the basis on which their liability to uniform business rate is calculated. [80208]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The current level of business rates paid by supermarkets in Wales is based on their rateable values, the "poundage" or "uniform business rate" fixed each year by the Secretary of State and the impact of any provisions for relief or exemptions. The rateable values broadly represent annual rentals for which the property might have been let on the open market in 1993, and are assessed using evidence of actual rents. All retail outlets in Wales are valued on this rental comparative method.

No steps have been taken to review the level of rates paid by supermarkets. The next revaluation of all rateable values takes effect on 1 April 2000 and will be based on market rents on 1 April 1998.

Following the transfer of functions this will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Non-domestic Rating Liability

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the instances on which he has used his powers under the Local government Act 1988 to confer exemptions from non-domestic rating liability. [80492]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: There have been no instances of the Secretary of State using his power under Schedule 5 paragraph 20 of the Local Government Finance Act 1998.

Following the transfer of functions this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Water Rates

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will issue an order, under section 2 of the Water Industry Act 1991, to require water supply undertakers in Wales to review their charging policy towards single person households with unmetered billing; [80207]

(2) how many orders he has made under the provisions of section 2 of the Water Industry Act 1991 with regard to the services provided by water undertakers for elderly people; and if he will make a statement. [80212]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Section 2 of the Water Industry Act 1991 does not provide the Secretary of State with order making powers in respect of single person households or pensioners. The Water Industry Bill currently before Parliament provides for householders, including the elderly and single persons, to opt to be charged on a measured basis without paying any initial costs for the installation of a meter. This may help those using less water to pay less. If the arrangement did not suit their individual needs, customers would have the right, within the first 12 months of installation, to revert to unmeasured charging.

The Government believe that households on low incomes or with special needs should have available to them a range of payment options. The Water Industry Bill will enable the Secretary of State to give guidance to the Director General of Water Services on matters to be taken into account in approving water companies' charges schemes. Such guidance could cover payment arrangements. The Bill also gives powers to specify by regulation matters which must be included in charges schemes. This power will enable specially targeted protection to be offered to particular categories of vulnerable customers. It is proposed that these powers to give guidance and make regulations will transfer to the National Assembly for Wales in respect of Dwr Cymru and Dee Valley Water. Clause 14 of the Bill will provide for a transfer of functions order to be made under section 22 of the Government of Wales Act 1998, without the need for an affirmative resolution procedure.

National Assembly

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to make the first standing orders of the National Assembly for Wales. [81034]

Mr. Michael: I have now made the first standing orders for the Assembly in accordance with section 50 of the Government of Wales Act, and am arranging for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Nuclear Waste Storage

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy not to permit the storage of nuclear waste at Trecwn in Pembrokeshire. [80173]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I understand that no application has been made to store nuclear waste at Trecwn. If one were, it would be fully considered on its facts, and against the background of representations from interested parties.

The Secretary of State for Wales' responsibilities in this area are shortly to transfer to the National Assembly for Wales.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

IACS Checks

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of IACS checks carried out in each of the EU member states. [73291]

Mr. Rooker: The following information has been provided by the European Commission for the total number of IACS applications subject to administrative checks in Member States during 1997:

Member	*Number*
Luxembourg	2,183
Belgium	45,019
Netherlands	51,276
Denmark	63,134
Sweden	66,745
Finland	79,644
Ireland	134,915
United Kingdom	146,241
Portugal	156,073
Austria	170,635
Greece	327,797
Germany	392,975
Spain	449,300
France	466,526
Italy	709,806

All Member States also carried out on-the-spot controls in respect of a proportion of applications.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the agenda for the Agriculture Council of 19 and 20 April. [79574]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Agriculture Council scheduled for 19 and 20 April has been cancelled.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) of 18 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *819*, concerning representations from the US Government, what was the nature of the representations received on each of the three occasions; what was the response of his Department in each case; and if he will make a statement. [80109]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* A wide range of agri/food issues of mutual interest to the UK and US Governments were discussed during the meetings in question and the UK's commitment to a science based approach to biotechnology which both protects public health and the environment, was made clear.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has had from *(a)* farmers and *(b)* farming organisations regarding funding proposals for the Food Standards Agency. [79880]

Mr. Rooker: We have received a number of representations, both formal and informal, from a variety of farming organisations and individual farmers during the recent public consultation on the draft Food Standards Bill and associated proposals for a levy scheme. Many criticised the levy proposals and suggested that alternative methods of funding the Agency be found.

We are now reviewing these responses, along with all the others received during the consultation, and will consider carefully all the comments made before deciding how to proceed.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations his Department has received on the calculation regarding the funding of the Food Standards Agency; and how many were in favour of the fixed £90 levy on food distributors. [80037]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* We received nearly a thousand responses to public consultation on the draft Food Standards Bill and associated proposals for a levy scheme. Over three quarters of these commented directly on the levy proposals. A large majority criticised the proposal that the levy be set at a flat rate, and suggested that alternative methods of funding the Agency be found or that the levy be graduated.

We are now reviewing these responses and will consider carefully all the comments made before deciding how to proceed.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he had with small retailers prior to drawing up his proposals for the Food Standards Agency; what estimate he has made of the likely cost to each food retailer of the Food Standards Agency over the first five years of its operation; and if he will make a statement. [80144]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Organisations and individuals representing the entire range of interests affected by the Food Standards Agency were included in consultations on Professor James's report in 1997, the subsequent White Paper in 1998 and on the draft Food Standards Bill and associated levy proposals earlier this year. In addition, I have held a number of regional meetings and officials have discussed the possible impact of the draft proposals with organisations representing small businesses.

The cost to food retailers over the first five years of the Agency's operation will depend on the initial rate of levy set and any amendments made during that period. Our proposal was that the levy should be set at £90 per annum. We are now considering the responses to the consultation. Additional costs due to the exercise of the Agency's functions cannot be anticipated. The draft Bill does, however, require the Agency to take account of the risks, costs and benefits of its proposed actions, consulting interested parties wherever possible.

Badgers

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made based on badger road-kills as to the extent of their tuberculosis infection. [80486]

Mr. Rooker: Until August 1990 badger carcases were collected and sampled as part of a national road traffic accident (RTA) survey of badgers. Since then RTA badger carcases have been collected and tested on an ad-hoc basis as part of the epidemiological investigation of TB incidents. Information from such carcases is not representative of the incidence of TB in the badger population as a whole.

Both the Krebs report and the report from the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB recommended reintroducing the road traffic accident survey as part of a programme to establish the prevalence of TB among badgers. We are currently considering these recommendations.

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what outside interests have been declared by the members of the Ad Hoc Expert Advisory Group on Vitamins and Minerals. [80628]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The Declaration of Interests of members of the Export Group on Vitamins and Minerals has been published and copies have been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what decisions were taken at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Expert Advisory Group on Vitamin and Mineral Supplements on 21 January; and if the minutes of that meeting have been published. [80636]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* A summary of the items discussed at the meeting of the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals on 21 January has been published and copies have been deposited in the Libraries of the House. The minutes of the meeting will be published once members of the Group have agreed them at their next meeting.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review food safety legislation to give greater protection to the continued availability of vitamin, mineral, and herbal supplements and blends; and if his Department has had any discussions with the European Commission on such matters. [80624]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The Government have no plans to review the way in which vitamin, mineral and herbal supplements and blends are regulated under food safety legislation. The Department responded in 1997 to a European Commission discussion paper on the harmonisation of controls on vitamin and mineral supplements and has been involved in discussions with the Commission on trade problems involving dietary supplements.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he expects the European Commission to publish the Draft Directive on Vitamin and Mineral Supplements; and what policy objectives he will be seeking to pursue when responding to that Draft when published; [80625]

(2) what assessment he has made of the legislative position in other European Member States on the availability of vitamin and mineral supplements; and what steps he is taking in advance of the publication of the forthcoming Draft EU Directive on such supplements to encourage other Member State Governments to accept the principles which underpin his Department's polices in this area. [80626]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Controls on vitamin and mineral supplements vary from Member State to Member State. In most cases the rules relating to supplements sold under food law are more restrictive than those applying in the United Kingdom and typically limit the permitted level of vitamins and minerals in supplements to the Recommended Daily Amount or a multiple thereof. The EC Commission is considering the possibility of harmonising the controls on vitamin and mineral supplements sold under food law but is not yet committed to legislating in this area. We have made clear to the Commission and to other Member States our view that any new controls should be based on safety considerations.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the role and status of the Codex Alimentarius Commission; what progress has been made by that Commission in considering trade in dietary supplements; what his Department contributes to the discussions of that Commission; and what policy objectives are being pursued by his Department in that context. [80627]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The Codex Alimentarius Commission is an FAO/WHO—sponsored intergovernmental body charged with the development of food standards to protect the health of consumers and facilitate international trade. The Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses has been discussing the elaboration of guidelines for dietary supplements containing vitamins and minerals for a number of years. When the draft guidelines were last discussed in September 1998 the UK argued, as it has done in the past, that maximum limits on the vitamin and mineral content of supplements should only be based on safety considerations. A similar line was taken by a number of other participants. But because there was a general lack of consensus on this, and other aspects of the proposal, little progress was made. The draft guidelines will not now be discussed again until the year 2000.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance he has given to the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals on the conclusion of the Agriculture Committee's Fifth report of Session 1997–98 (HC 753) on Vitamin B6 that the Group should be asked to produce recommendations for a framework for deciding whether regulation of dietary supplements is necessary at all. [80623]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Members of the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals are aware of the conclusions and recommendations of the Agriculture Select Committee's report on Vitamin B6. They are also aware of the Government's response to the Select Committee's recommendation that the Group should be asked to produce recommendations for a framework for deciding whether regulation of dietary supplement is necessary at all. This states that:

> "The Government considers that [the Expert Group's] terms of reference do not place the Expert Group under any obligation to establish principles that would result in limits on the level of all vitamins and minerals in supplements sold under food law. It is for the Food Advisory Committee or, if it is established by the time the Group reports, the Food Standards Agency, to consider whether, in the light of the scientific evidence provided by the Expert Group, changes to the regulation of dietary supplements or their labelling should be recommended to Government".

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the membership of the European Union's Scientific Committee for Food in relation to its work on the safety of vitamin and mineral supplements, indicating the scientific backgrounds and declared interests of members; and what are the Committee's terms of reference. [80638]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]*: The Scientific Committee on Food (SCF) has allocated its work on the safety of vitamin and mineral supplements, to a Vitamins and Minerals Task Force. The Commission has not yet published a list of members of the Task Force or its terms of reference.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the roles of the *(a)* Food Advisory Committee and *(b)* Ad Hoc Expert Advisory Group on Vitamins and Minerals in considering the safety of vitamin and mineral supplements. [80629]

Mr. Rooker: *[holding answer 13 April 1999]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on 25 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *410*.

Farmers (Generic Drugs)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of *(a)* farmers' access to generic drugs for use with animals and *(b)* the current cost structure of dispensing drugs through veterinary surgeons. [79877]

Mr. Rooker: When no authorised veterinary medicinal product exists for a condition in a particular species and in order to avoid causing unacceptable suffering, veterinary surgeons exercising their clinical judgment may prescribe for one or a small number of animals under their care in accordance with the following sequence:

(i) a veterinary medicine authorised for use in another species, or for a different use in the same species;

(ii) a medicine authorised in the UK for human use;

(iii) a medicine to be made up at the time on a one off basis by a veterinary surgeon or a properly authorised person.

In addition, veterinarians treating food producing animals under the above arrangements may only use medicines whose pharmacologically active ingredients are contained in a product already authorised for use in a food-producing animal. The products used may include generic products.

Decisions on the pricing of veterinary medicinal products are matters for the companies marketing them, taking account of commercial factors such as development and production costs and anticipated volume of sales. Similarly the cost of veterinary treatment is not governed by statutory rules but is a matter for negotiation between the veterinarian and client.

Dairy Produce (New Zealand)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current status of agreements with New Zealand regarding the supply of dairy produce. [79878]

Mr. Rooker: Under the GATT Uruguay Round Agreement the EU can import certain quantities of butter and cheese from New Zealand at preferential rates of duty. The annual quotas and preferential rates are as follows:

	Quantity (tonnes)	*Rate of duty (euros per tonne)*
Butter	76,667	868.8
Cheddar	7,000	170.6
Cheese for processing	4,000	170.6

Potatoes

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions processed potato importers have been found to have imported Monsanto's New Leaf potatoes or products derived from them; what quantity of material containing Monsanto's New Leaf potatoes has entered the food chain; and if he will make a statement. [80104]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *217*. I am not aware that any of these potatoes or their products have been imported into the UK. However, enforcement responsibility for imports of processed potatoes lies with local authorities.

Farmers (Land Management)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what funds under the Common Agricultural Policy will be available to assist farmers to manage land in environmentally sensitive ways. [79904]

Mr. Morley: Following the recent agreement in Berlin, funding under the Common Agricultural Policy for agri-environment schemes and all the other measures under the Rural Development Regulation will be roughly 4.3 beuro per annum for the whole Community. Subject to confirmation by the European Commission, this includes an addition of about 140 meuro for agri-environment schemes. No further breakdown is yet available.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what sanctions are imposed by the Marine Safety Agency on fishing vessels which are found to have underdeclared their engine capacity. [80238]

Mr. Morley: The recording of fishing vessel's engine capacity is a requirement of the Merchant Shipping (Registration of Ships) Regulations 1993 which are the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. New regulations, planned to come into force in September 1999, will enable the de-registration of a fishing vessel where its engine power does not match that registered. Checks on engine power are due to commence on 1 January 2000.

Genetically Modified Foods

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to publish the paper requested by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Biotechnology from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser on the human health implications of genetically modified foods. [75419]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I have been asked to reply.

The Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser have been asked to advise Ministers on the public health implications of the genetic modification of food. Their work will be conducted in accordance with the Government's Guidelines on "The Use of Scientific Advice in Policy Making", which sets out a framework for ensuring that Government policy is made on the basis of the best scientific advice. Advice from officials to Ministers is not normally published, but the possibility of publication in this case will be considered when the advice has been received.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 15 April 1999

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Fuel Duty Increases

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the actual impact of increased fuel duties since 1996 on the generation of pollutants against the estimates made. [78321]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The fuel duty escalator is a long-term strategy whose impact on transport emissions can be expected to build up over time.

The escalator is also part of a package of measures to reduce emissions, particularly of CO_2, through the promotion of fuel efficiency and reduced congestion. Taken on its own, increasing fuel duty by six per cent. per annum in real terms between 1996 and 2002 is currently estimated to reduce 2010 road traffic CO_2 emissions by between 2 million and 5 million tonnes of carbon as set out in the Climate Change Consultation Paper.

However, it is too early to provide an accurate assessment to date of the actual environmental impact of fuel duty increases since 1996, to compare with this estimate.

Transport Statistics

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what revisions have been made to his Department's forecasts of road traffic and numbers of vehicles as set out in Table 4.8 of Transport Statistics Great Britain 1998 Edition as a result of changes to road fuel duty and vehicle excise duty set out in the Budget. [79346]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* The Department's 1997 National Road Traffic Forecasts already take into account the expected impact of 6 per cent. per annum real increases in fuel duty to 2002 on car use and commercial traffic.

The changes to Vehicle Excise Duty announced in the Budget are designed to influence the fuel efficiency of vehicles purchased, rather than the total number of vehicles on the road or how much they are used.

European Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will give details of the occasions since 1 May 1997 when his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee unofficial text of draft European legislation. [80501]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The Department receives a large volume of both official and unofficial working texts during the course of negotiations on EU legislation. In order to facilitate the work of the European Scrutiny Committee and to keep it informed of the progress of negotiations, the Department regularly submits Explanatory Memoranda to the Committee. It would involve disproportionate cost to provide a definitive list of the unofficial documents made available to the Committee since 1 May.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee council working documents. [80543]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The Department receives a large volume of both official and unofficial working texts during the course of negotiations on EU legislation. In order to facilitate the work of the European Scrutiny Committee and to keep it informed of the progress of negotiations, the Department regularly submits Explanatory Memoranda to the Committee. It would involve disproportionate cost to provide a definitive list of the working documents made available to the Committee since 1 May.

Lead Replacement Petrol

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice will the Government provide to the motoring public on the purchase of lead replacement petrol. [80465]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In December 1998, the Government announced the start of an information campaign to reassure those motorists concerned about the implications of the general withdrawal of leaded petrol by 1 January 2000, in line with EU Directive 98/70/EC, and to inform them of alternatives, such as lead replacement petrol, that will be available. Some 3.5 million information leaflets have been distributed to petrol retailers and MOT garages to date.

The oil companies are developing their plans for informing and advertising to their customers the availability of lead replacement petrol products well in advance of January 1 and we are consulting with them on the appropriate information to provide to motorists. The Government are aware that there are still many concerned motorists who are unaware of the information that is already available and, therefore, a renewed publicity campaign to raise awareness further is being planned for this summer.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80744]

Mr. Meale: "Public Bodies 1998", copies of which are available in the Library of the House, provides information on the levels of remuneration paid, if any, to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which my Department is responsible.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80741]

Mr. Meale: Since May 1997, 3,539 questions have to date been tabled for answer on a named day. 81 per cent. have received a substantive answer on that day.

City Noise Maps

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress he has made on the introduction of city noise maps; what estimate he has made of the costs of such maps; who will be responsible for meeting such costs; and if he will make a statement. [80668]

Mr. Meale: My Department has been working with Birmingham City Council, which is mapping the City of Birmingham, to evaluate the usefulness and effectiveness of noise mapping as a tool in action. We expect the report of this work, which will assist in estimating the costs of such maps, to be published this summer. The work carried out in Birmingham will help to inform the European Commission's future proposals on ways in which to tackle noise.

Car Engines

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which models of new car currently on sale in the United Kingdom have under 1100cc engines. [78997]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget statement that, from June 1 this year, all new and existing cars of 1100cc or less will be eligible for a £55 reduction in vehicle excise duty. Manufacturers currently producing cars of 1100cc or less include Citroen, Daewoo, Daihatsu, Fiat, Hyundai, Seat, Suzuki, Vauxhall and Volkswagen. Popular cars within this range include the Citroen Saxo, Vauxhall Corsa, Nissan Micra and Volkswagen Polo.

GM Crops

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the monitoring arrangements for each of the currently agreed field test sites for genetically modified crops, specifying *(a)* which sites were subject to pre-planting environmental audits, *(b)* what sub-surface soil changes are being monitored, *(c)* what criteria for above-ground environmental impact form part of the field test monitoring and *(d)* which Government office conducts the monitoring. [78049]

Mr. Meacher: The monitoring arrangements for releases of genetically modified organisms are decided on a case by case basis for each consent application. This year, some sites will be used for the farm-scale evaluations which will compare the effects of the management of genetically modified crops on farmland wildlife with the effects of managing conventional crops.

The Government have awarded three contracts to study the effects of the management of GM crops on wildlife to a consortium led by the Natural Environment Research Council's (NERC) Institute of Terrestrial Ecology. The consortium also includes the Institute of Arable Crop Research and the Scottish Crop Research Institute. Each contract is worth £1.1m; funding is provided wholly by my Department, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and the Scottish Office.

The evaluations, which will take four years, will ensure that the managed development of the introduction of genetically modified crops announced at the House of Lords European Communities Sub-Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food last October, will take place safely. The evaluation programme will help address the concerns which have been raised by English Nature and the Royal Society of the Protection of Birds. We need to get reliable evidence to help us decide whether the management of genetically modified herbicide tolerant crops could have the potential to accelerate the decline in farmland wildlife which has taken place over the last 50 years.

In order to make comparisons between the GM and non-GM crops, the sites identified for the research in 2000 will be subject to pre-planting sampling and analysis. The research will look at the effects of the management of GM and non-GM crops on the soil; for example earthworm population monitoring provides a good indicator of the structure and fertility of the soil. Above ground environmental impact will be studied, again by carrying out surveys of plant populations and invertebrates.

This research will not only address issues relating to genetically modified crops. This is an extremely important opportunity to contribute towards a more detailed understanding of the effects of agricultural management practices on farmland wildlife generally.

This research will be monitored by an independent steering committee of experts which is currently being set up and will report to the Secretary of State; the results will be made widely available.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the President of the Council how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to her Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997, and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80735]

Mrs. Beckett: Of the 85 questions answered since May 1997, which were tabled for a named day answer, 85 per cent. (72) received an answer on that day.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the President of the Council if she will list the public appointments for which her

Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80750]

Mrs. Beckett: The information requested is listed for all appointments made by Her Majesty in Council, the Privy Council or I myself as President of the Council, for which there is provision for remuneration.

Appointment	*Remuneration*
Royal Pharmaceutical Society	
Chairman of the Statutory Committee	£322 per day
Inspectors	£26,357—£32,942 p.a.
Examiners (non-pharmacists)	£150 per day
British Broadcasting Corporation	
Chairman	£67,780 p.a.
Vice-Chairman	£17,910 p.a.
National Governor	£17,910 p.a.
Governor	£8,913 p.a.
Independent Schools Tribunal	
Education Panel Members	No remuneration as member—fee for hearing appeals to be decided.
Registered Homes Tribunal	
Panel of Experts Member	No remuneration as member—fee for hearing appeals is £162 per day.
HM Chief Inspector of Schools for England	£115,000 p.a.
HM Inspector of Schools for England	£32,000—£50,200 (national) £34,000—£52,600 (London)
HM Senior Chief Inspector for Scotland	£61,110—£98,400 p.a.
HM Deputy Senior Chief Inspector for Scotland	£50,510—£82,650 p.a.
HM Chief Inspectors for Scotland	£45,810—£73,470 p.a.
HM Inspectors for Scotland	£34,452—£52,383 p.a.
HM Chief Inspector of Schools for Wales	£55,750—£92,930 p.a.
HM Staff Inspector of Schools for Wales	£41,550—£65,270 p.a.
HM Inspector of Schools for Wales	£33,661—£51,522 p.a.

Study of Parliament Group

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Council if she will set out the remarks by the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, in respect of the performance of parliamentary Select Committees and members of the Liaison Committee at his recent meeting with the Study of Parliament Group; and if she will make a statement. [80382]

Mr. Tipping: I met members of the Study of Parliament Group recently for an informal discussion about modernisation of the House of Commons. The discussion was wide ranging and involved all participants. No detailed note was made. Among the subjects covered were pre-legislative scrutiny of draft Bills, the proposal to revive and adapt the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs and the possibility of a second forum or Main Committee.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Millennium Experience

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what proposals have been received by the new Millennium Experience Company for the sale of books and the promotion of reading and literature as part of the Millennium Experience: and what response the company has made; [77561]

(2) what provision will be made for the sale of books in the Millennium Dome; and how much space has been allocated for this purpose. [77560]

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the British books, other than those covering the Millennium Experience, which will be on sale at the Millennium Experience. [79403]

Janet Anderson: There will be a bookshop area within the New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) own retailing arrangements at the Millennium Dome where a wide range of books and other printed material relevant to the Millennium and the Millennium Experience will be on sale. It is not the NMEC's policy to seek to replicate in the Dome, or to compete with, the retailing experience which people can enjoy in their high streets and local town centres. The NMEC is not therefore, planning to provide outlets for hight street book sellers or other retailers. The final decision on the amount of retailing space which will be allocated to book sales will be taken by the NMEC at the appropriate time.

NMEC has received inquiries from two Members of this House and one inquiry from a member of the public about opportunities for retailing books and the promotion of reading and literature in the Dome.

Millennium Dome (School Visits)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what plans have been made to offer free travel for school parties visiting the Dome; at what cost; and who will be liable for the cost; [78177]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* rail companies, *(b)* coach and bus operators and *(c)* other travel operators regarding discounted or free travel arrangements for school parties visiting the Millennium Dome. [78036]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 22 March 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is not responsible for providing travel arrangements to the Dome but it has been concerned, in its negotiations with the travel industry, including coach and rail operators, to encourage and facilitate affordable package deals which combine travel and Dome admission costs. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced to this House on 17 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 1117, that NMEC's ticketing strategy would provide for up to one million free admissions for school children on the Education Tours Scheme. Whilst it is not part of the NMEC's remit to provide or fund free travel for school children it is in negotiations with the travel industry to encourage economic and affordable arrangements for them. Additionally, many schools are well placed to negotiate favourable deals through their established relationships with local travel operators. NMEC announced on 18 March that a number of the coach and rail operators are already indicating that attractive packages from around the UK will be available.

Departmental Staff (Ethnic Origin)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin, at 1 March, of *(a)* his private office, *(b)* Government special advisers, *(c)* his Policy Unit and *(d)* staff in total. [78514]

Mr. Chris Smith: *(a)* As at 1 March 1999, there were 29 employees in the private offices of Ministers in my Department and other Ministerial support offices, a percentage being from ethnic minorities. In order to protect the privacy of individuals, it is not possible to provide a breakdown of ethnic origin. *(b)* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *39*. *(c)* My Department does not have a policy unit. *(d)* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 31 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *710–11*.

PRIME MINISTER

Anglo-Spanish Summit

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Anglo-Spanish Summit on 10 and 11 April. [81160]

The Prime Minister: The summit was the first of its kind. It marked the recent step-change in Britain's bilateral relationship with Spain. The two Prime Ministers discussed the way forward in Europe. They underlined their interest in developing a competitive, prosperous Europe, and agreed a joint declaration on Employment and Economic reform and that a working group would take forward work in this area. Kosovo was inevitably discussed at length. The two Prime Ministers reiterated their shared support for continued military activity until Milosovic complied unreservedly to the five conditions set by NATO.

Strategic Communications Unit

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on staffing levels in the Strategic Communications Unit. [80060]

The Prime Minister: The Strategic Communications Unit has 9 members, 2 of whom are special advisers.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to her Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80729]

Marjorie Mowlam: Between 1 May 1997 and 1 April 1999 this Department was asked 783 named day questions of which 411, or 53.4 per cent. received a substantive reply on the named day.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Greenbury Report

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to introduce legislation to implement the recommendations of the Greenbury report; and if he will make a statement. [79537]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Greenbury report made recommendations to a number of groups and organisations. Some organisations, such as the Government and the London Stock Exchange, have implemented their recommendations in full.

The Government have noted, however, that some listed companies have not yet adopted sufficient transparency in their Reports such that shareholders have access to the information they may reasonably require to enable them to assess the company's general policy on executive remuneration. The Government also wish to see clearer evidence that boards are complying with the Greenbury recommendation that they

"should consider each year whether the circumstances are such that shareholders should be invited to approve the policy set out in their remuneration report".

In addition, the Government would like to see institutional investors using their power and influence to ensure the implementation of best practice as set out in the Greenbury Code.

I have asked my officials to monitor the current round of annual general meetings for evidence of a more positive approach to the Greenbury Code from companies and institutional investors. I will consider the case for legislation to amend the Companies Act 1985 in the light of the results of this monitoring.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80743]

Mr. Byers: According to our records, since May 1997, 2,510 questions for answer on a named day have been tabled to this Department, 31 per cent. of these received a substantive reply on the named day.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80760]

Mr. Byers: The publication "Public Bodies 1998", copies of which are available in the Library of the House, provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of non-departmental public bodies for which my Department is responsible. The majority of public appointments, however, are unpaid as most of those who accept a public appointment do so on a voluntary, unpaid basis.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Noise-induced Sensorineural Hearing Loss

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his letter ref. POS (3) 3019/18 of 26 January, what reports she has had on scientific evidence relating to noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss. [80586]

Mr. Bayley *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* When we were elected, we were determined to be satisfied that the Department's approach to the assessment of hearing loss on war pensions was seen to be in line with current scientific understanding. We immediately ordered a review of the scientific evidence behind the Department's approach. The review was conducted by four independent hearing loss experts chaired by the Government's then Chief Medical Officer.

The report of the expert team received in March 1998 confirmed that hearing loss due to noise, such as that experienced in service, does not increase after one is removed from it or as subsequent age-related hearing loss is added to it. These conclusions confirmed that the Department's approach to the assessment of hearing loss under the War Pension Scheme is in line with the current scientific understanding.

The review also recommended that the matter be looked at again in one years time. The Under-Secretary, my noble Friend, Baroness Hollis of Heigham, therefore, asked the war pensions medical policy adviser to report to her by the end of February 1999 on any relevant developments. The report of this further review was placed in the Libraries of House of Commons and the House of Lords on 2 March 1999. It confirms that there is no new scientific evidence to raise a reasonable doubt that noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss progressively deteriorates once a person is removed from the source of the noise which caused it; or that the combination of noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss and subsequent hearing loss due to age is not more than additive.

These are assumptions which have gained general acceptance and have formed the basis of an International Standard which has been in place for nearly 20 years and which have successfully provided the basis for medico-legal work world wide.

The conclusions of this further review again confirm that the Department's current approach to the assessment of hearing loss is in line with current scientific evidence. This in turn, means that War Disablement Pensions cannot be increased in respect of hearing loss due to ageing. They can only be paid for disablement which is due to service.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80727]

Mr. Timms: Since May 1997, we have received 2,304 parliamentary questions for answer on a named day, of these, 2,090 (91 per cent.) were given a substantive answer on the day requested.

This Department aims to give a holding reply to no more than 10 per cent. of all parliamentary questions for answer on a named day. However, where, for example, detailed work has to be carried out by the Department's analytical branches or the Government's Actuary Department, a full response cannot always be provided in the time allowed.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80758]

Mr. Timms: "Public Bodies 1998", copies of which are available in the Library of the House, provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which the Department is responsible. Many of these appointments are unpaid volunteers.

SCOTLAND

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80410]

Mr. Macdonald: The Treaty of Amsterdam will have minimal impact on the responsibilities of the Department.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80733]

Mr. Dewar: The information for the period May 1997—February 1998 is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. The information for the period March 1998—March 1999 is as follows:

Nominated questions tabled 1 March 1998–31 March 1999	*% answered substantively on date nominated*
1,021	62

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80752]

Mr. Dewar: "Public Bodies 1998"—copies of which are available in the Library of the House—provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which my Department is responsible. The majority of public appointments, however, are unpaid as most of those who accept a public appointment do so on a voluntary basis.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Capital Modernisation Fund

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's plans for allocating the Unallocated Capital Modernisation Fund moneys as set out in Table 1.4, page 16, of the Scottish Office Departmental report, CM 4215, March 1999. [80291]

Mr. Dewar: Of the £75m unallocated from the Capital Modernisation Fund, I have decided to allocate £4.2m to the elimination of mixed sex accommodation from the NHS in Scotland, and £0.3m to the Highlands and Island Fire Board. The allocation of the balance will be for the Scottish Executive to determine.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Primary Education Funding

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list which local authority areas in Scotland are providing a lower level of education funding per primary school pupil in real terms in 1999–2000 than in 1998–1999. [80677]

Mrs. Liddell: This information is not available centrally.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for all task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 *(a)* their dates of establishment, *(b)* those which have issued final reports and their dates of publication, *(c)* those which have been terminated and their dates of termination and *(d)* for those bodies still in existence, expected reporting and termination dates. [79275]

Mr. Straw: The information is set out in the table.

Name of review/task force	*Date of establishment*	*If final report published, date of publication*	*If terminated, date of termination*	*Expected report date*	*Expected termination date*
Human Rights Task Force	28 January 1999			No date set	No date set
Review of Prison Service Health Care	Autumn 1997	29 March 1999	—	—	No date set
Review of Prison Service Mother and Baby Units	3 December 1998	—	—	Summer 1999	No date set
Inter-departmental Review of Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses	13 June 1997	10 June 1998	Last meeting on 13 March 1998	—	—
Review of the Tote	14 July 1998			May 1999	No date set
Sex Offences Review	25 January 1999		—	December 1999	December 1999
Working Group on the Giving Age	January 1999			Not due to publish a report	No date set
Working Party on Electoral Procedures	21 January 1998		—	Summer 1999	No date set

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all those task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 which have set up *(a)* sub-groups, *(b)* working parties and *(c)* other subsidiary committees. [79252]

Mr. Straw: The information is set out in the table.

Name of task force/ policy review	*Sub-group*	*Working parties*	*Other subsidiary committees*
Human Rights Task Force	This has a subsidiary group which receives copies of papers and minutes and can attend Task Force meetings when there are items of specific interest		
Review of Prison Service Mother and Baby Units		A working group has been set up which comprises senior prison staff, Representatives of external Agencies, Specialists in the Field of maternal and child care and Representatives from key interest Groups	
Review of the Tote		This review had a Working group to inform the operations of External Consultants	
Sex Offences Review			The steering group of the Review has an external reference group to advise it
Working Group on the Giving Age		Set up to advise the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on the Giving Age	
Working Party on Electoral Procedures		A working group on Rolling Registration has delivered an internal report to the Working Party	An electoral forms and equipment group is considering in detail electoral forms management A returning officers' fees and charges group will consider the scope for simplifying the Returning Officers' Charges Order

Senator Pinochet

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will decide whether to issue a second authority to proceed in response to the Spanish extradition request for Senator Pinochet. [80227]

Mr. Straw: I signed a second Authority to Proceed in respect of Senator Pinochet yesterday evening. The Spanish request for his extradition will now be considered by the courts. The reasons for my decision were sent to all the parties concerned in a letter from one of my officials as set out:

"I am writing to inform you that the Secretary of State yesterday evening signed a second Authority to Proceed ("ATP") in respect of Senator Pinochet. The original ATP is being transmitted to Bow Street and a copy, through the Crown Office, to the Divisional Court. I am notifying the Chief Clerk and the head of the Crown Office of this decision by fax. I enclose a copy of the ATP, signed on 14 April 1999, for your information.

2. The Secretary of State is not under an obligation to provide reasons for his decision to sign an ATP. However, in this case, and in the light of the matters raised by the representations, he has agreed to give his reasons at this stage.

3. In deciding to issue the new ATP, the Secretary of State has proceeded as if no previous ATP was in existence, and has considered the matter entirely afresh. He has limited himself to taking account only of considerations which are relevant to the question whether the new ATP should be issued or not.

Representations

4. Although there is no provision in the Extradition Act ("the Act") for representations at this stage in extradition proceedings, the Secretary of State has taken careful account of these in making his decision: in particular, representations made to him by legal representatives of Senator Pinochet; the Spanish Government; the Chilean Government; and legal representatives for "the Interveners" before the House of Lords. He also received material from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. To the extent that he has considered previously submitted representations, he has done so having regard to the latest judgment of the House of Lords and only in so far as they had relevance to the question whether a new ATP should be issued.

5. The decision to issue the new Authority to Proceed was taken personally by the Secretary of State, who was satisfied that he took this decision with an open mind.

The House of Lords ruling, 24 March 1999

6. Six of the seven members of the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords stated their view that the Secretary of State should reconsider his decision of 9 December 1998 in the light of the very considerable reduction in the number of extraditable charges from those identified by their ruling on 25 November.

7. The Secretary of State invited the assistance of the Divisional Court in finding a means to quash the first ATP of 9 December 1998, in order to comply with the recommendation of the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords in their latest decision. The Divisional Court indicated on Monday 29 March 1999 that the court could quash the first ATP with the consent of all parties to the proceedings at a hearing shortly after the Secretary of State had taken his decision whether a new ATP should be issued. The necessary procedural steps will be taken in consultation with Senator Pinochet's legal representatives and the Crown Prosecution Service on behalf of Spain.

The Secretary of State's approach to his decision

8. The Secretary of State has taken a fresh decision whether to issue a new ATP under section 7(4) of the Act, which provides:

"On receipt of any such request the Secretary of State may issue an authority to proceed unless it appears to him that an order of the return of the person concerned could not lawfully be made, or would not in fact be made, in accordance with the provisions of this Act."

9. The Secretary of State has taken the approach that if it appears to him at this stage that no order for the return of Senator Pinochet to Spain could lawfully be made, or would in fact be made, then he should not issue a new ATP. If those conditions do not exist, he has a discretion whether or not to issue a new ATP.

10. He has had regard to the relevant extradition arrangement, namely the European Convention on Extradition ("ECE"). The United Kingdom's obligation is to extradite Senator Pinochet to Spain consistently with the ECE. That is a consideration to which the Secretary of State gives particular weight.

11. The Secretary of State has taken his decision having taken account of, in particular, the judgment of the House of Lords of 24 March, and the appropriate and separate roles of the courts and himself in the scheme of the Act. There are various matters which the Secretary of State has considered at this stage which can be the subject of far closer and more satisfactory examination during the court stages of the extradition process (committal and habeas corpus) than is possible at this preliminary stage. In relation to such matters, the Secretary of State considers that it is appropriate for them to be explored in full detail in the court proceedings, after notice of all points has been given to each party to permit argument by that party and (as necessary) the adducing of formal evidence and evidence in answer.

12. In reaching his decision, the Secretary of State has considered the application of the Act to the Spanish request and all the general restrictions on surrender in sections 6 and 12 of the Act.

Extradition crimes

13. The Secretary of State has had well in mind the latest ruling of the House of Lords, to the effect that under United Kingdom law the only extraditable offences referred to in the Spanish request are offences after 8 December 1988.

14. Section 1 of the Act provides that where, as in the case of Spain, extradition procedures under Part III of the Act are available, a person in the United Kingdom who: "is accused in that state of the commission of an extradition crime" may be arrested and returned to that state in accordance with those procedures.

15. The Secretary of State considers that Senator Pinochet is accused, in Spain, of offences in the relevant period equivalent to United Kingdom offences of conspiracy to torture and torture, and that these are extradition crimes.

16. The Secretary of State has taken account of section 9(8) of the Act, and the terms of paragraph 3 of the European Convention on Extradition Order 1990, which provides:

"Where an extradition request is made by a Convention State in respect of a person accused of an offence, it shall not be necessary:

(a) for that State to furnish the court of committal with evidence sufficient to warrant the trial of that person if the extradition crime had taken place within the jurisdiction of that court; or

(b) for the court of committal to be satisfied that there is evidence sufficient to warrant the trial of that person.".

17. The Secretary of State has proceeded on the basis that he is entitled, at this stage of the extradition proceedings against Senator Pinochet, to treat the Spanish request as well-founded as a matter of Spanish law.

Sovereign or diplomatic immunity

18. In light of the latest decision of the House of Lords, the Secretary of State has proceeded on the basis that, in relation to extraditable offences, Senator Pinochet does not enjoy any immunity, save in respect of offences of murder and conspiracy to murder of which he is accused. Senator Pinochet does not enjoy immunity in relation to the extradition crimes of conspiracy to torture and torture referred to above.

19. The Secretary of State has had regard to what is alleged in the request to have happened before 8 December 1988, but only in so far as it is relevant to the criminality of what is alleged to have happened after that date—i.e. in relation to the question whether acts of torture after that date were done in the course of a conspiracy begun before, such as to amount to an accusation of a conspiracy to torture continuing after that date for the purposes of section 7(5) of the Act.

20. The Secretary of State does not accept the argument, put on behalf of Senator Pinochet, that he should be treated as immune unless there is evidence before him to show that Senator Pinochet had actually committed the relevant offences of which he is accused. Nor does the Secretary of State understand the majority of the House of Lords to have ruled (as Senator Pinochet contends) that immunity in respect of torture or conspiracy to torture only ceases to apply where torture is widespread or systematic.

21. It does not appear to the Secretary of State that Senator Pinochet is entitled to diplomatic immunity as the head of a special mission.

Additional Spanish material

22. The Secretary of State was invited, by the Crown Prosecution Service on behalf of Spain, to consider fresh material issued by the fifth Central Magistrate's Court of Madrid, dated 10 December 1998, 24 December 1998, 26 March 1999 and 5 April 1999, subsequent to the formal request received in the Home Office on 11 November 1998. He does not regard the material to be "supplementary material" under Article 13 of the ECE since, as the requested Party in that article, he has not considered it necessary to request such material from Spain in order to make his decision. The Secretary of State has, however, had regard to this material as part of the representations put before him in the context of considering whether (as Senator Pinochet contends) the Spanish accusations are not made and maintained in good faith.

General restrictions

23. The Secretary of State has considered all the general restrictions on surrender in sections 6 and 12 of the Act. In particular, he has had regard to:

Political Offences (section 6(1)(a))

24. Section 24 of the Act provides that no offence to which section 1 of the Suppression of Terrorism Act applies can be regarded as an offence of a political character. Since Spain is a designated country for the purposes of section 24, the Secretary of State considers that all the offences that are to be included in the ATP fall within this provision. In any event, it does not appear to him that the offences charged are of a political character.

Punishment for political opinions (sections 6(1)(c) and (d))

25. The Secretary of State does not consider that there are good grounds for concluding that the request has been issued for this purpose.

The passage of time (section 12(2)(a)(ii))

26. The Secretary of State has not been notified by the Spanish Government that any of the offences for which extradition is sought are time barred from prosecution, and considers that it is reasonable to proceed at this stage on the footing that no relevant time bar appears to apply.

27. Nor does the Secretary of State consider that the passage of time would render it unjust or oppressive to issue an ATP in this case. It does not appear that Senator Pinochet is unfit to stand trial. Although the Secretary of State has had regard to the effect of the latest House of Lords judgment in reducing the number and extent of potential charges, the remaining offences for which return has been sought are serious, and in the nature of those for which, domestically, passage of time would not be regarded as restricting prosecution. The case is an accusation case and, ordinarily, the reliability of witnesses' memories may properly be regarded as a matter for the court of prosecution.

Accusation not made in good faith in the interests of justice (section 12(2)(a)(iii))

28. The Secretary of State does not believe that there are sufficient grounds for concluding the surviving accusations have been made other than in good faith in the interests of justice. The Secretary of State has in mind that this issue can be addressed by the courts under section 11(3)(c) of the Act, and that it is a question, among others, which can be re-examined in the light of any developments at the stage when he comes to exercise his final discretion at the end of the extradition process, under section 12 of the Act.

The Secretary of State's discretion

29. The Secretary of State has considered the ambit of his discretion under section 7(4) and his residual general discretion under section 12 of the Act, which would apply in relation to the return of Senator Pinochet were he to be committed by the Bow Street magistrate under section 9 of the Act. The Secretary of State has been advised that the discretion conferred upon him is wide, and he has, therefore, taken a range of factors into consideration.

30. A large number of points were raised in representations concerning the Secretary of State's discretion, including aspects of issues that fall to be considered under the general restrictions on return contained in the Act. In particular, the Secretary of Sate has had regard to the following:

The change in the ambit of the case against Senator Pinochet

31. The Secretary of State has considered the latest judgment of the House of Lords, and its impact upon the number and extent of the offences for which extradition may be sought, and concluded that the formal request from Spain appears to him to disclose the extradition crimes of torture and conspiracy to torture. He has considered the representations made on behalf of Senator Pinochet alleging that the manner in which the Senator's extradition has been sought constitutes an abuse of the extradition process. The Secretary of State does not consider that at this stage these allegations amount to a sufficient ground not to issue an ATP.

Pending proceedings in Chile

32. Senator Pinochet's legal representatives, and the Chilean Government, argued that the Senator should be returned to Chile where he could stand trial, and that it was artificial to require an extradition request from Chile where such return would be voluntary. However, in the absence of such a request, there is no extradition request from the Chilean Government which the Secretary of State could consider under section 12(5) of the Act. Moreover, there is no provision of international law which excludes Spain's jurisdiction in this matter. The Secretary of State does not consider the possibility of a trial in Chile to be a factor that outweighs the United Kingdom's obligations under the ECE to extradite Senator Pinochet to Spain.

Humanitarian considerations

33. Representations were made on behalf of the Senator that his age and health would render it unjust or oppressive to issue an Authority to Proceed. The Secretary of State has considered these carefully, but concluded that it does not appear that the Senator is unfit to stand trial and concluded that in all the circumstances it would not be unjust or oppressive for him to stand trial in relation to the remaining extraditable offences with which he is charged. The Secretary of State also has in mind that this question, among others, can be re-examined in the light of any developments, at the stage when he comes to exercise his final discretion at the end of the extradition process, under section 12 of the Act.

Other factors

34. The Secretary of State has also considered other factors under his general discretion including:

(i) the possible effect of extradition proceedings on the stability of Chile, and its future democracy; and

(ii) the possible effect of extradition proceedings on the United Kingdom national interest.

35. He has concluded that the material and representations put before him do not amount to sufficient grounds not to issue an ATP.

Conclusion

36. In the event that Senator Pinochet is committed to await the Secretary of State's decision on his return, the Secretary of State will consider the extradition request afresh under section 12 of the Act. At that stage, he will be able to take into account any findings in the committal proceedings and any habeas corpus proceedings as well as any representations which Senator Pinochet may wish to make against return.

37. If Senator Pinochet decides to apply for leave to move for judicial review of the Secretary of State's decision, he reserves the right to expand upon the reasons given in this letter in an affidavit to be sworn by one of his officials."

Women's Prison (Ashford)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the timetable for building a women's prison at Ashford, Middlesex. [80426]

Mr. George Howarth: The cost of construction and management of the proposed new prison at Ashford will fall outside the period of the current comprehensive spending review. The timetable for its construction will depend upon funding and other priorities within the Prison Service estate.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80737]

Mr. Straw: Between 1 May 1997 and 12 April 1999, a total of 2,269 Named Day parliamentary questions were tabled for answer by my Department. Of these, 75.4 per cent. (2,012) received a substantive reply on the day requested.

Prisoners (Hepatitis)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people currently detained in prison are suffering from hepatitis; and what proportion of the prison population this figure represents. [80209]

Mr. George Howarth: The number of prisoners reported by Prison Service establishments as suffering from various forms of hepatitis at 30 September 1998 (the last date for which a complete set of figures is currently available) was:

	Number
Hepatitis A	3
Acute hepatitis B	25
Chronic hepatitis B	75
Chronic hepatitis C	463
Total	566
Prison population	65,913
Proportion of population	0.86%

Prison Sites (Essex)

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is examining potential sites for a prison *(a)* in Colchester and *(b)* elsewhere in Essex. [80517]

Mr. George Howarth: No.

Europol

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) of 18 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *721–22*, on Europol, if he will provide a breakdown by category of the types of request submitted by the United Kingdom for information from Europol. [80456]

Kate Hoey: There was a total of 394 requests made by United Kingdom law enforcement agencies during 1998 of which 82.5 per cent. were drug related; 5.6 per cent. were linked to immigration; 8.1 per cent. covered money laundering activities; 3 per cent. were related to trafficking in stolen vehicles and 0.8 per cent. concerned trafficking in human beings.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to her Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80728]

Clare Short: Since May 1997, 454 questions were tabled to my Department for a written answer on a named day; 95 per cent. received an answer on that day.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the public appointments for which her Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80757]

Clare Short: The only public appointments for which my Department is responsible and for which remuneration is provided are to the Board of the Commonwealth Development Corporation. The information is as follows:

£

Board Member	*Remuneration (per annum)*
Earl Cairns (Chair)	30,000
Ms J. Almond (Deputy Chair)	10,000
Mr. H. Singhania	500
Dr. J. Kydd	500
Mr. R. Murray	7,500
Professor D. Pearce	7,500
Ms C. Hayman	7,500
Mr. R. Seal	7,500
Mr. P. Kent	7,500

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

IACS Maps

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what cost benefit analysis he has carried out on IACS map checks. [73343]

Mr. Rooker: The programme of map checks was introduced following evaluations undertaken by the European Commission of the Department's arrangements for developing a central IACS database recording details of field areas included in Area Aid Applications in accordance with the requirements of Community legislation. There would have been a risk of significant disallowance of reimbursement of Exchequer expenditure from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund on the schemes to which IACS applies if such checks had not been instituted.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the administrative cost to date to his Department of carrying out IACS map checks. [73290]

Mr. Rooker: The information is not available. A number of checks are undertaken to meet the requirements laid down in Community legislation governing IACS and administrative costs of carrying out IACS map checks between 1994–1998 were not separately recorded.

Pig and Poultry Bonemeal

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to allow the use of pig and poultry bonemeal. [75843]

Mr. Rooker: The existing bans on the use of mammalian meat and bone meal (MBM) in feed for farmed animals and as fertiliser on agricultural land do not extend to MBM derived from poultry.

Representations have been made by the pig industry and the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) to allow porcine MBM to be fed to poultry on the condition that processing takes place in rendering plants dedicated to pig waste. The existing ban was put in place on the

recommendation of SEAC, and the Government continue to base their handling of BSE on the advice on the Committee.

Before we would be prepared to ask SEAC to look at the use of porcine MBM for export or poultry feed purposes the industry itself will need to address the key issues of how monitoring at all stages of production and distribution would be carried out to avoid the possibility of cross contamination.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total number of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental Special Advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76819]

Mr. Nick Brown: Between 2 May 1997 and 28 February 1999, Special Advisers in this Department have made visits overseas on 12 occasions in an official capacity. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code. Costs are accounted for within the total costs for any overseas trips by Ministers. I have 2 departmental operational advisers and no non-departmental special advisers.

There have been no occasions since 2 May 1997 when Special Advisers in this Department have travelled abroad in an official capacity unaccompanied by Ministers.

Operational Licences

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for *(a)* farms and *(b)* other agriculture-related industries (i) all licences and permits issued by his Department and its agencies to farms or companies enabling them to carry out their business, (ii) the cost of each such licence or permit in (A) 1997–98 and (B) 1999–2000 and (iii) current number of farms or companies which are in receipt of each such licence or permit. [76873]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The 106 authorisations, including those relating to approval or registration of premises enabling farms and other agriculture-related industries to carry out their businesses, have been placed in the Library of the House.

Banana Import Regime

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the basis for maintaining the European Union banana import regime; and when he expects the publication of the arbitrator's report on the matter. [79159]

Mr. Rooker: The EU's banana regime is designed to meet both our commitments to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries under the Lomé Convention, Protocol 5 in particular, and our World Trade Organisation (WTO) obligations.

Reports from both the WTO arbitrator and the Dispute Settlement Panel were published on 12 April and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Vitamins and Minerals Advisory Group

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that his ad hoc expert advisory group on vitamins and minerals takes note of the recommendations of the Agriculture Committee's report on vitamin B6 in relation to *(a)* the quality of scientific advice and *(b)* the use of safety factors. [79484]

Mr. Rooker: Members of the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals are aware of the conclusions and recommendations of the Agriculture Select Committee's report on vitamin B6 and will take these into account in carrying out its remit. The Group will, as a matter of course, give consideration to the use of safety factors and the quality of the available scientific evidence, and I am satisfied they are capable of reaching their own conclusions on these matters.

Genetically Modified Soya

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions *(a)* he has had and *(b)* he plans to have with Brazil's Agriculture Minister in respect of genetically modified free soya supplies to the UK; and if he will make a statement. [80557]

Mr. Rooker: I have not met, or have plans to meet, the Brazilian Agriculture Minister to discuss GM soya supplies. This Department has published a list of suppliers of GM free soya for anyone wanting to obtain such material.

Badgers

Mr. Syms: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects his Department's study into the links between TB in cattle and badgers to be published. [80288]

Mr. Rooker: Under the TB strategy I announced on 17 August last year, the links between TB in cattle and badgers will be examined through research and the randomised badger culling trial. The trial is planned to run for five or more years. The research projects, whose details I announced on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *301–02*, will take between two and five years to complete, and some may provide the basis for further projects. Subject to the need to ensure that premature publication does not jeopardise future work, I envisage that the results will be published as they become available.

Food Safety

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on schemes which promote industry-wide production systems in *(a)* agriculture and *(b)* horticulture to demonstrate the safety and traceability of the food produced. [80244]

Mr. Rooker: Industry-wide assurance schemes which go beyond statutory requirements are for the industry to take forward in light of their assessment of prevailing market conditions. I welcome the development of these assurance schemes because they can help provide the consumer with confidence in the integrity of the product.

Genetically Modified Maize

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the suppliers of genetically modified free maize. [80558]

Mr. Rooker: GM maize is not grown commercially in the EU, except for a small amount in Spain and France last year, all of which was used within Spain. Supplies of non-GM maize are thus widely available within Europe and a list of such suppliers is therefore unnecessary.

Honey

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement in respect of measures to prevent contamination of honey by genetically modified material. [80556]

Mr. Rooker: The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes hosted a workshop in 1991 to consider the safety of pollen from GM plants in honey. The workshop's conclusion was that the consumption of gene products from pollen in honey was likely to be negligible. The results from three research projects commissioned by MAFF to investigate this further subsequently confirmed this conclusion.

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has obtained regarding regulations affecting the sale of higher-dose vitamin and mineral supplements in other European Union member states. [80222]

Mr. Rooker: Legislation on vitamin and mineral supplements varies from member state to member state. In most cases the rules relating to supplements sold under food law are more restrictive than those applying in the United Kingdom and typically limit the permitted level of vitamins and minerals in supplements to the Recommended Daily Amount or a multiple thereof.

Beef Exports (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much beef has been exported from Northern Ireland since the ban was lifted on 16 March 1998. [80180]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* There has only been one company involved in the export of beef from Northern Ireland since the lifting of the ban. In these circumstances, I cannot provide the information requested as it is commercial in confidence.

Milk Imports

Mr. Webb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the share of the domestic retail milk market currently accounted for by imports; and if he will provide corresponding figures for each of the last 10 years. [79939]

Mr. Rooker: In 1998, it is estimated that imports accounted for 0.8 per cent. of the domestic retail liquid drinking milk market. The corresponding figures for each of the last ten years are shown in the table.

Liquid drinking milk in the United Kingdom

(thousand tonnes unless otherwise specified)

Year	*Production*[1]	*Imports*[2]	*Exports*[2]	*Total domestic use*	*Imports as a percentage of total domestic use*
1988	6,965	11	4	6,973	0.2
1989	6,921	17	3	6,935	0.3
1990	6,927	21	3	6,945	0.3
1991	6,903	37	3	6,938	0.5
1992	6,980	67	3	7,044	1.0
1993	7,008	54	3	7,059	0.8
1994	6,966	68	4	7,029	1.0
1995	7,128	89	5	7,212	1.2
1996	7,041	68	5	7,104	1.0
1997	6,955	63	6	7,013	0.9
1998	6,942	56	10	6,988	0.8

[1] Production includes liquid drinking milk manufactured in the UK by dairy companies and farms for retail sale. It is not possible to identify separately the products for which imported raw milk is used by dairy companies. It is therefore possible that a small proportion of liquid drinking milk produced in the United Kingdom is manufactured from such imported raw milk.

[2] Overseas trade in liquid milk in immediate packings of a net content not exceeding two litres as shown in the Overseas Trade Statistics. Liquid milk in larger packings is excluded as such trade could be for manufacturing use rather than for retail sale.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80726]

Mr. Morley: In the period from 1 of May 1997 to 31 March 1999, 1,884 parliamentary questions were tabled to this Department for written answer on a named day. Of these, 53 per cent. received a substantive reply on that day.

Genetically Modified Food

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to publish the paper requested by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Biotechnology from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Adviser on the human health implications of genetically-modified foods. [75419]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I have been asked to reply.

The Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Scientific Adviser have been asked to advise Ministers on the public health implications of the genetic modification of food. Their work will be conducted in accordance with the Government's Guidelines on "The Use of Scientific Advice in Policy Making", which sets out a framework for ensuring that Government policy is made on the basis of the best scientific advice. Advice from officials to Ministers is not normally published but the possibility of publication in this case will be considered when the advice has been received.

DEFENCE

Departmental Property

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many overseas homes are owned by his Department; what proportion are occupied; and what plans he has to improve the quality of overseas service homes. [77450]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

No-fly Zones (Iraq)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many times Iraqi aircraft have violated the no-fly zones *(a)* in the five years preceding Operation Desert Fox and *(b)* since the conclusion of Operation Desert Fox; [77229]

(2) how many times allied aircraft have fired at Iraqi aircraft and installations in the no-fly zones when allied aircraft have been initially locked on by Iraqi forces *(a)* in the five years preceding Operation Desert Fox and *(b)* since the conclusion of Operation Desert Fox; [77230]

(3) how many times allied aircraft have fired at Iraqi aircraft and installations in the no-fly zones without being initially locked on by Iraqi forces *(a)* in the five years preceding Operation Desert Fox and *(b)* since the conclusion of Operation Desert Fox. [77231]

Mr. George Robertson: *[holding answer 22 March 1999]:* In the five years preceding Operation Desert Fox (16–19 December 1998), Iraqi aircraft violated the no-fly zones on over 80 occasions. RAF aircraft did not fire on any Iraqi aircraft or installations during this time. Since Operation Desert Fox there have been some 120 violations of the no-fly zones, in which Iraqi aircraft have frequently tried to lure our aircraft within range of surface-to-air missile traps.

Our aircraft are routinely illuminated by Iraqi air defence network radars when patrolling the no-fly zones, but radar lock-on is a relatively rare occurrence as it exposes the initiator to the risk of an armed response. The Iraqis more commonly employ other means, including optical guidance, to direct their surface-to-air missiles. Statistics of lock-on occurrences have not been kept. RAF aircraft have attacked Iraqi targets on 15 occasions since Operation Desert Fox, in direct response to sustained attempts to shoot down coalition aircraft and kill aircrew.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to his Department in each of the last five years of *(a)* public ceremonial duties and *(b)* VIP transport. [80710]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Kosovo

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the costs to the United Kingdom of current international action relating to the situation in Kosovo. [79917]

Mr. George Robertson: The total cost of military operations relating to Kosovo is impossible to estimate at this stage, given we do not know what Milosevic's next moves will be, and how we will need to respond. The costs will, however, be substantial. Our assessment of costs incurred as of 8 April is some £17 million; this does not include the costs of replenishing stock of ordnance expended.

Service Injuries

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records are kept by his Department of allegations concerning *(a)* physical and *(b)* mental health injuries suffered by former members of the armed forces as a result of their service. [80724]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My Department does not keep records of allegations of physical or mental health injuries suffered by former members of the Armed Forces attributable to their service. However, reported cases of injury are kept on personal medical records of serving members of the HM Forces. My Department also maintains records of common law claims for compensation from existing and former members of the Armed Forces concerning allegations of physical and mental injuries attributable to their Service.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80753]

Mr. Spellar: "Public Bodies 1998"—copies of which are available in the Library of the House—provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which the MOD is responsible.

Since that report was written, the Nuclear Weapons Safety Committee and the Nuclear Powered Warships Safety Committee, which shared the same membership, have amalgamated in 1998, to form the Defence Nuclear Safety Committee, DNSC. The remuneration of DNSC members is identical to that of members of the previous Committees.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80732]

Mr. Spellar: According to our records 2,026 Named Day Questions have been tabled to my Department. Information on what percentage of them received a substantive reply could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Our database cannot currently provide that information, however, we are looking at ways to refine it which may enable us to provide such information in the future.

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80535]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer the Minister for the Cabinet Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), gave him on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *239–40*.

TREASURY

Road Haulage Industry

16. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the increases in diesel duty and vehicle excise duty on the future operations of the road haulage industry. [79460]

Ms Hewitt: In making his Budget judgment, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer took a wide range of factors into account.

Small Firms

17. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement concerning his Budget measures to help small firms. [79461]

Mrs. Roche: The Budget introduced a substantial package of measures for smaller businesses which will stimulate greater investment, innovation and growth within the small business sector and which will ensure that the sector is an important source of dynamism, innovation and competition for the economy as a whole.

Debt Relief

18. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to press for higher levels of debt cancellation at the forthcoming meetings of the IMF and the World Bank. [79462]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor intends to take the opportunity at the Spring Meetings of the IMF/World Bank later this month to take forward his recent initiative on poverty reduction in the developing world, calling for faster, deeper and wider debt relief.

National Insurance Fund

19. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the future of the Treasury supplement to the national insurance fund. [79463]

Mr. Milburn: In 1999–2000, we expect benefit expenditure from the National Insurance Fund broadly to match income, in which case the Fund will not need a substantial Treasury Grant. The maximum Treasury Grant which may be made available to the Fund in this financial year shall not exceed 2 per cent. of the estimated benefit expenditure from the Fund. For subsequent years, we will decide on the level of Treasury Grant in light of advice from the Government Actuary.

Withholding Tax

20. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the use of the British veto in respect of EC proposals for a common withholding tax. [79464]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *640*.

Working Families Tax Credit

21. **Mr. Stringer:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the working families tax credit. [79465]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor has received a number of very helpful and constructive representations which have informed the development of WFTC and DPTC. And I have also had useful meetings with representative groups. In addition, the Inland Revenue continue to consult on a regular basis with a wide range of interested parties, on the details of the scheme and its administration.

30. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to evaluate the impact of the working families tax credit. [79474]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government believe that the WFTC will create a strong new incentive for people with children to move into work and up the earnings scale, and provide a welcome boost to the incomes of low and middle income families with children. We naturally want to assess the effects of the new policy and ensure that it is achieved in the most effective way. We will therefore be carrying out a full evaluation of the impact of the WFTC.

Public Sector Debt

22. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy towards net public sector debt. [79466]

Mr. Milburn: The Government's Sustainable Investment Rule requires that public sector net debt as a proportion of GDP be held over the economic cycle at a stable and prudent level. The projections contained in Budget '99 show net public debt falling below 40 per cent. of GDP this year and to around 35 per cent. of GDP by 2003–04.

Family-friendly Policies

23. **Ms Harman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he has put in place to help make work pay for parents balancing work and home responsibilities. [79467]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government place a high priority on policies designed to enable parents balance work and family life. The reforms to income tax and National Insurance Contributions, the National Minimum Wage and the introduction of Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) from October 1999 with the generous child care tax credit will make work pay for parents and tackle the unemployment trap. At the same time the

increased generosity of the WFTC will mean that parents, whether single or a couple, have greater choice in deciding who works and how much.

Tax Revenue

24. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount of tax revenue to be received between 1997–98 and 2001–02 from measures introduced since May 1997. [79468]

Dawn Primarolo: Table B9 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report shows forecasts of taxes and social security contributions, net of tax credits, as a per cent. of GDP, after taking into account measures introduced since May 1997. Forecasts of taxes and social security contributions, net of tax credits, in cash terms are published in Table B10. Forecasts of money GDP are published in Table B4.

Economic and Monetary Union

25. **Mr. Edward Davey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for discussions with the Governor of the European Central Bank and the Commission about the Maastricht conditions on currency stability and how they apply to the UK's adoption of the euro. [79469]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has regular discussions on a range of economic issues with Central Bank Governors from other countries, including representatives from the euro-area, and the European Commission.

The Government's new framework for macroeconomic policy provides the best platform to deliver greater exchange rate stability.

29. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the United Kingdom Government of conversion from sterling to the euro. [79473]

Ms Hewitt: The cost to the Government of conversion to the euro would depend on the detailed approach that the public sector took to the changeover. The outline National Changeover Plan is a first step in planning how the UK would make the changeover to the single currency. A further plan will be published in around a year's time.

32. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the timing of any referendum on British entry into economic and monetary union. [79476]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's Outline National Changeover Plan published on 23 February 1999 explained that, if the Government decide to recommend joining the single currency and Parliament agrees, the speed at which the UK could move to a referendum would depend on how quickly the practical arrangements for a referendum could be put in place. The minimum period in which the UK could move from a decision by Government to a referendum is about 4 months.

National Changeover Plan

26. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to support small businesses in connection with the national changeover plan. [79470]

Ms Hewitt: In developing the changeover plan, the Government have consulted extensively with key representatives from the SME sector, such as the British Chambers of Commerce, the Forum of Private Business, and the Federation of Small Business. We are very grateful for the constructive help and support they have given to the planning process.

The Treasury's Euro Preparations Unit will continue to provide practical help and training via the many business intermediaries, such as Business Link, who have been assisting SMEs to prepare for the euro's introduction.

Employer-provided Transport (Taxation)

27. **Mr. Peter Bradley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the Inland Revenue's policy in respect of current tax demands to employers providing public transport for their work force. [79471]

Dawn Primarolo: I am sure my hon. Friend welcomes the tax reliefs for green transport benefits announced in the Budget; these include exemptions for employer provided large works buses, and for subsidies to local public bus services, to get employees to and from work. These reliefs take effect from 6 April 1999. I am afraid there are no grounds for ignoring tax payable under the law applying to benefits for previous years.

Pesticide Tax

28. **Mr. Sawford:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the Government's proposals for a pesticide tax. [79472]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have received a number of representations on the subject of a possible tax or charge on the use of pesticides.

A research report commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the possible design and impact of a tax or charge on pesticides was published on 24 March, with a list of consultative questions. The Government will consider carefully the views expressed on a number of issues raised in the report in deciding how best to proceed.

Income and Wealth Disparities

31. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to use the tax system and other measures to reduce disparities of income and wealth. [79475]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to building a fairer society in which everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential and enjoy the benefits of high and stable levels of economic growth. The Working Families Tax Credit, the 10p tax rate, increased support for children and changes to the National Insurance system, among others, will increase the fairness of the tax system and encourage work incentives.

The Government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion, which will be set out in detail in a report later this year, is based around investment in prevention, work as the best way out of poverty, help for those who cannot work, and regeneration of the poorest communities.

Women (Impact of Budget)

33. **Jackie Ballard:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the Budget on women. [79477]

Dawn Primarolo: This Budget builds on the series of measures of particular benefit to women already implemented since we came to office. Women gain from this Budget right across the income distribution. This Budget demonstrates this Government's commitment to ensuring that women get a fair deal out of the tax and benefits system.

Pensioners

34. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from pensioner organisations on his Budget announcements on *(a)* the winter fuel allowance and *(b)* the minimum pension guarantee; and if he will make a statement. [79478]

Ms Hewitt: The announcement of the fivefold increase in the winter fuel allowance, which will give £100 to every eligible pensioner household this coming winter, and the decision to uprate the minimum income guarantee for pensioners by earnings rather than prices in April 2000, have been generally welcomed.

Cider Duties

35. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his policy regarding duties on cider. [79480]

Mrs. Roche: I have received a number of representations about cider duties including letters from members of the public. In the run up to the Budget I received a formal submission from the National Association of Cider Markers and subsequently met them on 24 February to hear their case.

Child Maintenance Payments

36. **Mr. McCabe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of the Budget on those who claim tax relief on child maintenance payments. [79481]

Dawn Primarolo: The tax relief for maintenance payments introduced by the last Government in 1988 is not a relief for child maintenance. It is a relief for payments made to a former husband or wife following separation or divorce. The former husband or wife may use the payments they receive to maintain a child, but equally the relief applies where there is no child in the family.

The Inland Revenue estimate that the tax relief will be worth an average of £220 in the tax year 1999–2000, before it is withdrawn from 2000–01. This includes the transitional relief for those paying under maintenance arrangements set up before 15 March 1988.

Taxes

37. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on the level of taxes which will be paid in 1999–2000 of the measures in the three Budgets since July 1997. [79482]

Dawn Primarolo: Table B9 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report shows forecasts of taxes and social security contributions, net of tax credits, as a per cent. of GDP, after taking into account measures introduced since May 1997. Forecasts of taxes and social security contributions, net of tax credits, in cash terms are published in Table B10. Forecasts of money GDP are published in Table B4.

Income Tax Credits

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the level of taxation in 2001–02 if income tax credits are accounted for as expenditure rather than as negative taxation. [79451]

Mr. Milburn: On any definition, taxes are expected to be lower in 2001–02 than planned by the previous Government in their last Budget.

Financial Services and Markets Bill

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 97, for what reasons his answer did not list the jurisdictions referred to in paragraph 2–2 of the Financial Services and Markets Bill Progress report, published by Her Majesty's Treasury in March. [78973]

Ms Hewitt: Treasury officials discuss many matters of common interest with colleagues from overseas administrations regularly, but generally on the basis that these are private discussions.

Income Tax (Pensioners)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number and proportion of pensioners who would pay *(a)* no income tax and *(b)* income tax at (i) 10 per cent., (ii) 20 per cent., (iii) 23 per cent. and (iv) 40 per cent. in 1999–2000 or the latest year for which figures are available if people aged over 65 years received only the basic personal tax allowance. [78974]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for 1999–2000 are given in the table.

	Excluding age related personal allowance		*Including age related personal allowance as enhanced in the Budget*	
Marginal rate of tax	*Number of pensioners*[1] *(thousands)*	*Proportion (percentage)*	*Number of pensioners (thousands)*	*Proportion (percentage)*
Non-taxpayer	6,100	57	7,000	65
10 per cent.	550	5	450	4
20 per cent.	750	7	750	7
23 per cent.	3,150	29	2,350	22
40 per cent.	150	1	150	1
Total	10,700		10,700	

[1] Women aged 60 and over and men aged 65 and over

Renewable Energy

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with colleagues at the DTI and DETR about the potential economic benefits of renewable energy in connection with the preparation of the Government review. [79546]

Ms Hewitt: As Minister responsible for environmental issues including renewable energy in the Treasury, I have had a number of discussions with colleagues in the run up to the publication of the Renewables Review consultation document.

Road Fuel Duty

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the amount of extra revenue arising from the increase in road fuel duty in his Budget statement, including the added effects of VAT, which will come from Scotland. [79321]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* The Revenue consequence of the road fuel duty changes in the 1999 Budget is set out in Table 1.11 of the FSBR. The share of oil deliveries made in Scotland is set out in the 1998 Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics.

Widow's Bereavement Allowance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many widows bereaved in each of the five years after 5 April 2000 he estimates will no longer be able to claim widow's bereavement allowance; and what total amount they will lose in relation to previous entitlement as a result; [79438]

(2) what estimate he has made of the savings to be achieved as a result of the abolition of the widow's bereavement allowance. [79437]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* It is estimated that around 220,000 widows claim the widow's bereavement allowance each year, in respect of a bereavement in that or the previous year. In 1999–2000, the allowance is £1,970, given at the rate of 10 per cent., but only three quarters of claimants—170,000—have sufficient income to use the allowance. The full year revenue effects of withdrawing the allowance is estimated to be £30 million in 2001–02. Separate estimates are not available for subsequent years.

Medical Insurance (Age Discrimination)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will seek to reduce age discrimination by private medical insurance providers. [80202]

Ms Hewitt: It is for insurers to decide which factors to take into account in assessing risk and pricing insurance products.

Official Statistics

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish a White Paper on the future framework for official statistics. [79903]

Ms Hewitt: The Government produced a Green Paper "Statistics: A Matter of Trust" last year which set out options for achieving its goal of enhancing the integrity, both actual and perceived, of official status.

We will be bringing forward plans in this area as soon as they are finalised.

Employment

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *205*, on employment, what is the impact on employment of a 1 per cent. increase in employment costs stemming from Government legislative requirements, unmatched by productivity changes. [79915]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have introduced a comprehensive set of policies aimed at promoting employment and incentives to work. Government legislative requirements have been designed with these aims in mind and, taken together, are not expected to raise employment costs.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *205*, on employment, if he will estimate the impact of a 1 per cent. increase in wages on employment levels from supply side pressures, where there is no compensatory increase in productivity. [79914]

Ms Hewitt: Reductions in labour supply would tend to be associated with higher wage rates and lower employment. In contrast, Government policies are aimed at increasing labour supply and employment by promoting work incentives.

Energy Tax

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to exempt renewable energy from an energy tax levied on business. [79863]

Ms Hewitt: Customs and Excise issued a consultation document on 9 March on the design and administration issues relating to the climate change levy. The consultation document asks for views on whether and, if so, how it might be possible to offer tax relief to electricity generated from renewable sources of energy.

As made clear in the consultation document, there are a number of technical difficulties that would have to be overcome, including identifying the amount of electricity supplied from renewable sources under current electricity pool arrangements. The Government would welcome views on these issues.

As indicated in the Financial Statement and Budget Report, the Government also intend to provide an additional £50 million a year from 2001–02 for schemes aimed at promoting energy efficiency and support for renewable sources of energy, like solar and wind power.

Gift Aid Scheme

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that telephone inquiries in respect of the gift aid scheme are given information about smaller and regional charities. [R] [80029]

Ms Hewitt: The Gift Aid 2000 campaign is designed to raise awareness of the Millennium Gift Aid scheme, which provides tax relief for donations to UK charities to support education and anti-poverty projects in the world's

80 poorest countries. It is proposed to extend the scheme to provide also for the relief of poverty of refugees from designated countries and to designate Kosovo.

People who ring the Gift Aid 2000 telephone number can choose up to three charities to benefit from their donation. If a donor requires assistance in choosing a charity, the operator will suggest some for the donor's approval. These are randomly selected by computer, either from a list of charities working in a part of the world or on a charitable activity nominated by the donor, or from the complete list of participating charities. All participating charities have an equal chance.

UK Abatement

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on the UK abatement of the exclusion of annual pre-accession expenditure for each of the next eight years. [80014]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by the Prime Minister on 29 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 731–47.

Birth Weights

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the percentage of live and stillborn births in the United Kingdom, where birth weight was *(a)* under 2,500 grammes and *(b)* under 3,000 grammes in each of the past five years. [80392]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Frank Field, dated 15 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on births.

The information requested is shown in the attached table.

Number of live and stillbirths by birthweight and percentages of live and stillbirths with a stated birthweight, for the residents of United Kingdom 1993–97

Number

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Live and stillbirths (total births)					
Total stated	742,579	736,015	732,819	733,287	727,095
Under 2,500 grams	52,837	53,362	55,549	55,167	55,785
Under 3,000 grams	173,709	173,544	178,408	177,097	177,097
Birthweight not stated	22,558	17,949	2,573	1,605	1,193
Live births					
Total stated	738,482	731,842	728,773	729,299	723,298
Under 2,500 grams	50,038	50,548	52,761	52,408	53,165
Under 3,000 grams	170,393	170,209	175,129	173,838	174,012
Birthweight not stated	22,280	17,797	2,498	1,543	1,113
Stillbirths					
Total stated	4,097	4,173	4,046	3,988	3,797
Under 2,500 grams	2,799	2,814	2,788	2,759	2,620
Under 3,000 grams	3,316	3,335	3,279	3,259	3,085
Birthweight not stated	278	152	75	62	80

Number of live and stillbirths by birthweight and percentages of live and stillbirths with a stated birthweight, for the residents of United Kingdom 1993–97

Percentages

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Live and stillbirths (total births)					
Under 2,500 grams	7.1	7.3	7.6	7.5	7.7
Under 3,000 grams	23.4	23.6	24.3	24.2	24.4
Live births					
Under 2,500 grams	6.8	6.9	7.2	7.2	7.4
Under 3,000 grams	23.1	23.3	24.0	23.8	24.1
Stillbirths					
Under 2,500 grams	66.3	67.4	68.9	69.2	69.0
Under 3,000 grams	80.9	79.9	81.0	81.7	81.2

Note:

The number of births without a stated birthweight are shown in this table, but have been excluded from any calculations.

Sources:

Office for National Statistics

Information and Statistics Division, Scotland

DHSS, Northern Ireland

Unemployment

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women, living in England and Wales who are at present unemployed and are aged (i) 50 to 55 years, (ii) 55 to 60 years and (iii) 60 to 65 years. [80643]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 15 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on unemployment in England and Wales.

The table below shows the latest estimates from the Autumn 1998 (September-November) Labour Force Survey (LFS), the ONS measure of unemployment. This is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and counts as unemployed people who are: a) without a paid job; b) available to start work within the next two weeks and c) have either looked for work in the last four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained. Estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

ILO unemployment totals[1] and rates by age group and sex, England and Wales, Autumn 1998

Thousand

Age	*All persons*	*Men*	*Women*
50 to 54	99	64	35
55 to 59	80	50	30
60 to 64	40	35	[2]

[1] Total ILO unemployed as a percentage of all economically active persons in the relevant age group
[2] Sample size too small for reliable estimate
Source:
Labour Force Survey, ONS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80740]

Ms Hewitt: Of the 2,320 questions tabled for answer on a named day, 733 (32 per cent.) were answered substantively on that day. Approximately 60 per cent. of all named day questions were answered within two days of the due day.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Randall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of vehicle excise duty for a 40 tonne lorry in the United Kingdom in 1998–99. [79445]

Ms Hewitt: Vehicles plated to operate at 40 tonnes on 5 axles were first allowed on UK roads on 1 January 1999. They cause over 30 per cent. more road damage than 5 axle vehicles operating at 38 tonnes, the previous maximum weight. Therefore, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his March Budget statement that vehicle excise duty for such lorries plated at 40 tonnes would be set at £5,750 strongly to discourage their use at this weight.

In light of the environmental impact the Chancellor also announced in his Budget Statement that vehicle excise duty for 41 tonne, 6 axle lorries, which cause considerably less road damage, has been set at £2,500.

WALES

Rainfall Statistics

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the daily rainfall figures since 1 January 1998 at *(a)* the Clywedog Dam, *(b)* Lake Vyrnwy and *(c)* the Welshpool measurement centre; and if he will make a statement; [80715]

(2) what the flow measurements were from 1 January 1998 to 1 April 1999 on *(a)* the Clywedog Dam, *(b)* the dam at Lake Vyrnwy and *(c)* the River Severn below the Nescliffe Brook; and if he will make a statement; [80688]

(3) what the daily water levels were from 1 January 1998 to 1 April 1999 at *(a)* the Clywedog Dam and *(b)* the dam at Lake Vyrnwy; and if he will make a statement. [80716]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: These data are collected by the Environment Agency. I have asked the Environment Agency Wales' General Manager to send this information to the hon. Member. A copy of his reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80761]

Mr. Michael: "Public Bodies 1998", copies of which are available in the Library of the House, provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which my Department is responsible. In addition my Department publishes a quarterly report containing details of public appointments for which I have responsibility. A copy of this report is also available in the Library of the House. The majority of public appointments are unpaid, as most of those who accept a public appointment do so on a voluntary basis.

Responsibility for making public appointments in Wales will transfer to the National Assembly.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80742]

Mr. Michael: The number of Named Day parliamentary questions tabled since 1 May 1997 is 824, of which 91.5% received a substantive reply on that day.

HEALTH

Ambulance Visits (Bedfordshire)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* frequency of visits and *(b)* costs of visits, by ambulance personnel to nursing homes and residential homes in Mid-Bedfordshire in cases where an elderly person fell and staff were unable to assist in the last year for which figures are available. [80488]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Frail Elderly (Bedfordshire)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many frail elderly Mid-Bedfordshire residents are currently accommodated in acute hospitals. [80482]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Residential Care (Bedfordshire)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the occupancy levels in nursing homes and residential homes within Mid-Bedfordshire in the last year for which figures are available. [80462]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is readily available only at local social services authority/health authority level. The latest average occupancy rate for nursing homes in Bedfordshire health authority is 80 per cent. at 31 March 1997. The most recent estimated average occupancy rate for Bedfordshire local authority is 90 per cent. over the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998.

Tobacco Control

Mr. Singh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of financial and human resources has the Government committed in support of the work of the International Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. [80484]

Ms Jowell: We are committed to co-operating with other Governments in the establishment of an international framework convention on tobacco control. The White Paper "Smoking Kills" indicated our support for the World Health Organisation's work on the convention and we are discussing with WHO how we can most effectively help them.

It is too early to say what resources will be necessary or will be made available.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80731]

Ms Jowell: 2,543 Parliamentary Questions have been tabled to this Department on a Named Day since May 1997. Of these 2,185, or 86 per cent., have been answered substantively on that day.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80754]

Mr. Denham: Information on the public appointments for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is responsible, and the levels of remuneration payable, is contained in the Department of Health Public Appointments Annual Report. The Report is currently being prepared for all those in post at 1 March 1999 and will be published in June. Copies of last year's report, giving details of those appointed at 1 March 1998 and the levels of remuneration then payable, is in the Library.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Servants (Wales)

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many black and other ethnic minority people are employed in the Civil Service in Wales; what percentage they are of all civil servants in Wales; how many are in each grade; and what percentage they are of each grade. [80197]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: At least 290 civil servants of ethnic minority origin were employed in Wales on 1 April 1998, 1.4 per cent. of staff whose ethnic origin is known. The table shows the breakdown by responsibility level.

Ethnic minority staff[1,2] in post in Wales at 1 April 1998

Responsibility level[3]	*Ethnic minority staff in post*	*% of staff with known ethnic origin*[4]
Senior Civil Service	0	0.0
Grade 6	—[5]	1.9
Grade 7	6	1.0
SEO	5	0.9
HEO	11	0.6
EO	42	0.9
AO	157	1.8
AA	64	1.5

[1] Non-industrial staff
[2] Excludes 2 per cent. of staff in Departments who do not provide data to Mandate, the Cabinet Office's database of Civil Service personnel
[3] Responsibility levels are an approximate assignment of staff to a level of seniority broadly equivalent to the former service wide grades
[4] Staff who responded to departmental surveys on ethnic origin
[5] In order to preserve confidentiality number withheld and the total rounded to nearest 10 as there are less than five staff at this level
Source:
Cabinet Office, Mandate

Public Inquiries

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proposals the Government have to introduce changes to speed up the process of public inquiries. [79888]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: On 31 March, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning announced how the Government proposed to proceed with their proposals to improve the efficiency of planning appeal procedures, whether handled by written

representations, hearings or public inquiries. He also announced challenging new targets for the Planning Inspectorate for handling planning appeals by written representations, hearings and inquiries.

The Government will be issuing shortly a consultation paper on ways in which the handling of major infrastructure projects of national importance might be improved. The Government have also published a Consultation Document on Transport Safety, as announced on 31 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *759–63*, which notes the tensions there can sometimes be in the relationship between accident investigations and inquiries, and the pursuit of legal proceedings, and invites views on the right balance to be struck.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80734]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: For the purpose of this answer, questions tabled to me as the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and to my predecessor my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) have been aggregated. Details relating to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) for his period as Minister without Portfolio have been recorded separately.

The figures for the number of named day parliamentary questions tabled to this Department and the percentage which received a substantive reply on the due date from 1 May 1997 to 31 March 1999 are as follows:

Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Total named day parliamentary questions tabled: 317

Percentage receiving a substantive answer on the due date: 74

Minister without Portfolio

Total named day parliamentary questions tabled: 223

Percentage receiving a substantive answer on the due date: 56.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80751]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: "Public Bodies 1998"—copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House—provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which my Department is responsible. The majority of public appointments, however, are unpaid as most of those who accept a public appointment do so on a voluntary basis.

Political Advisers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the numbers of, and salary bill for, political advisers on the latest date for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [80114]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: There are currently 67 Special Advisers in post. The total pay bill for Special Advisers in 1998–99, including pension contributions, was £3.5 million.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80738]

Mr. Hoon: According to Departmental records, 454 parliamentary questions for written answer on a named day were tabled to the Lord Chancellor's Department between May 1997 and the end of March 1999; of these, 409, or 90 per cent. received a substantive reply on that day.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80747]

Mr. Hoon: "Public Bodies 1998"—copies of which are available in the Library of the House—provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of the non-departmental public bodies for which my Department is responsible. The majority of public appointments, however, are unpaid as most of those who accept a public appointment do so on a voluntary basis.

Uninsured Driving

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will consult on allowing magistrates to impose a wider range of sentences on people convicted of driving without insurance. [80472]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Driving without insurance is a summary only offence which currently attracts a maximum penalty of a Level 5 (£5,000) fine and an automatic endorsement of the offender's driving licence of between 6 and 8 points. The court may also disqualify the offender from driving.

The Government are aware of concern about both the maximum penalty available and the sentences which are imposed in practice. The Home Office has therefore sought the views of the Magistrates' Association on this issue. The Association's response is currently under consideration.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Joint Consultative Committee

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to

the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *197*, if he will list the range of common foreign and security policy issues covered by the proposed extension of the remit of the Joint Consultative Committee; and what documents will be available to members of the Committee. [80179]

Ms Quin: Under its revised remit, the Joint Consultative Committee will discuss, in the light of the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, the most effective means of realising a Common Foreign and Security Policy. It will examine the development of policy through the adoption of EU Common Strategies, Common Positions and Joint Actions, and the need for greater co-ordination and co-operation in European Defence, with particular reference to the relationship between the EU, NATO and the WEU. The Joint Consultative Committee will make proposals as appropriate.

Documents are prepared as required for meetings of the Joint Consultative Committee.

Senator Pinochet

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the content of the reports received between 16 and 20 October from the British Embassy at Madrid, on the investigations into Senator Pinochet in Spain; and if he will make a statement. [80406]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: For details of the report from our Embassy in Madrid on 16 October, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) on 2 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *597–98*. On 19 October 1998, the Embassy dispatched two reports, commenting on Spanish reactions to the arrest of Senator Pinochet and on Judge Garzon's intentions as regards making an early visit to London to interview him.

South Africa

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to assist in the conduct of free and fair elections in South Africa in June 1999. [80217]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: In response to an invitation from the South African Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the FCO will send a small team of observers to the South African elections on 2 June.

Economic Community of West African States

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support his Department is giving to the moratorium on the import, export and manufacture of light weapons adopted by the Economic Community of West African States in October 1998. [80503]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Government fully support the ECOWAS moratorium on light weapons.

The moratorium applies to the import, export and manufacture of pistols, rifles, submachine guns, carbines, machine guns, anti-tank missiles, mortars and howitzers up to a calibre of 85mm and ammunition and spare parts for the above.

A Code of Conduct was agreed by ECOWAS Member States on 24 March 1999 regarding the implementation of the moratorium. If an ECOWAS Member State believes it has a valid reason for an exemption to the moratorium, the Code states that the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat should be involved in the consultation process. Similarly for proposed imports of weapons for peacekeeping operations, the Code states that the ECOWAS Secretariat should be notified.

The Government will take the provisions of the moratorium and the ECOWAS Code of Conduct fully into account when assessing relevant export licence applications.

The summary of Government Commitments on the application of Strategic Export Controls has been updated to reflect the moratorium and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The UK will brief participating states to the Wassenaar Arrangement on the moratorium, and our policy towards it, at the next Wassenaar Arrangement General Working Group meeting.

The UK is also financially supporting the moratorium. The Department for International Development has pledged $500,000 over three years to assist the UNDP in the implementation of the moratorium. We are also considering how the UK might help ECOWAS administer the moratorium.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to announce in advance the agenda for the General Affairs Council where an agenda has been prepared in draft form. [80018]

Ms Quin: I refer the right hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *773*, and on 26 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *427*. Every month, I give the House details of the items expected on the agendas of the Council of Ministers during the following month. For example, I outlined the draft agenda of the March General Affairs Council on 25 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *440–46*.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80739]

Ms Quin: Our existing database does not allow us to compile the information requested without incurring disproportionate cost in its retrieval; however, its replacement will.

Since 1 May 1997, we have issued 436 holding replies.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Education Funding

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent per pupil in (i) Derbyshire, (ii) Nottinghamshire, (iii) Staffordshire, (iv) Surrey and (v) Hertfordshire in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in each of the last five years at constant prices from all public sources of funds. [79363]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* The following table shows net institutional expenditure on LEA maintained schools for the years 1993–94 to 1997–98, the latest year for which figures are available. Figures have been calculated using December 1998 Gross Domestic Product deflators. The table also shows notional figures for 1998–99 and 1999–2000, based on an assumption that the expenditure of the authorities in question in 1997–98 escalates at the same rate as their respective SSA increases for those years.

Net institutional expenditure per pupil in primary and secondary schools in LEA-maintained schools 1993–94 to 1997

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Primary							
Derbyshire[1]	1,783	1,734	1,673	1,640	1,578	1,616	1,665
Derby City	—	—	—	—	1,661	1,703	1,743
Nottinghamshire	1,829	1,840	1,774	1,765	1,732	1,762	1,812
Staffordshire[1]	1,718	1,701	1,617	1,628	1,575	1,625	1,673
Stoke on Trent	—	—	—	—	1,596	1,645	1,663
Surrey	1,882	1,896	1,946	1,816	1,776	1,822	1,881
Hertfordshire	1,855	1,867	1,856	1,827	1,754	1,815	1,863
Secondary							
Derbyshire[1]	2,659	2,489	2,362	2,319	2,287	2,342	2,414
Derby City	—	—	—	—	2,595	2,660	2,723
Nottinghamshire	2,630	2,604	2,466	2,417	2,362	2,403	2,471
Staffordshire[1]	2,319	2,287	2,179	2,190	2,115	2,182	2,247
Stoke on Trent	—	—	—	—	2,306	2,377	2,403
Surrey	2,360	2,428	2,389	2,317	2,321	2,381	2,459
Hertfordshire	2,661	2,461	2,502	2,481	2,516	2,603	2,673

[1] LEA reorganised in 1997–98

Note:
Figures for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are notional estimates

Book Allowance

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many state schools will not receive the full £2,000 book allowance announced in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement on 9 March, because they have fewer than 100 pupils on roll; and what estimate he has made of the extra cost of granting such schools the fixed £2,000 rather than the £20 per pupil currently allocated. [79887]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Around 20,000 schools will receive £2,000. There are around 4,000 schools with fewer than 100 pupils which will receive £20 per pupil. It would cost a further £3.1 million to allocate £2,000 each to these schools.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80736]

Mr. Mudie: Between 1 May 1997 and 13 April, 2,002 parliamentary questions have been tabled to the Department for written answer on a named day, 75 per cent. received a substantive reply on that day.

Teachers' Pay Awards

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the cost of *(a)* the 3.5 per cent. pay award for all teachers and *(b)* the higher awards for head teachers announced in February 1999 will be in 1999–2000; and if he will list for the current year the pay increases due to head teachers and the dates on which they will become payable. [80675]

Ms Estelle Morris: The cost in 1999–2000 of the general teachers' pay award in England will be £397 million, and the estimated additional cost of headteacher pay restructuring will be £14 million.

All headteachers received a pay increase of 3.5 per cent. on 1 April. Pay increases due to individual headteachers on 1 September 1999 will vary, but average percentage increases according to current school size group are estimated to be as follows:

Percentage

Group	*Nursery/primary*	*Secondary*
1	5	—
of which fewer than 100 pupils	6	—
2	2	3
3	2	3
4	2	1
5	—	1
6	—	1

Single Teacher Classes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the average size of single teacher classes in primary schools in January 1999 *(a)* in each local education authority and *(b)* in total; and what were the corresponding figures in January 1998; [80681]

(2) what was the average size of single teacher classes in secondary schools in January 1999 *(a)* in each local education authority and *(b)* in total; and what were the corresponding figures in January 1998. [80682]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Average class size of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools
Local Education Authority areas, January 1998 and 1999

	Primary		Secondary	
	1998	*1999*[1]	*1998*	*1999*[1]
England	27.2	27.5	21.7	21.8
North East	27.3	26.7	22.2	22.3
Hartlepool	28.0	27.1	22.9	22.9
Middlesbrough	27.2	26.9	21.5	22.4
Redcar and Cleveland	27.1	26.6	22.5	22.5
Stockton-on-Tees	27.4	26.7	22.1	22.8
Darlington	29.3	27.2	23.0	22.6
Durham	28.1	29.9	22.3	22.9
Northumberland	27.3	26.4	23.0	23.0
Gateshead	26.0	26.2	21.6	21.0
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	27.6	26.7	21.8	21.7
North Tyneside	27.5	27.1	21.8	22.2
South Tyneside	26.9	26.2	22.5	22.8
Sunderland	25.9	25.7	21.5	21.7
North West and Merseyside	28.0	27.6	21.8	21.8
North West	28.2	27.8	22.1	22.1
Cheshire[2]	27.2	—	21.4	—
Cheshire[1]	—	27.4	—	21.3
Halton	—	26.3	—	20.4
Warrington	—	27.9	—	21.8
Cumbria	26.2	25.8	21.1	20.9
Bolton	29.0	29.0	22.0	21.7
Bury	29.2	27.4	23.5	23.6
Manchester	27.7	27.6	22.4	22.7
Oldham	29.6	29.0	22.2	22.2
Rochdale	29.5	29.1	22.7	22.4
Salford	27.3	27.3	22.3	22.1
Stockport	28.3	28.0	23.9	23.7
Tameside	29.5	28.3	23.2	23.3
Trafford	28.7	28.4	21.1	21.1
Wigan	28.2	27.3	21.8	21.7
Lancashire[2]	28.9	—	22.5	—
Lancashire[1]	—	28.2	—	22.4
Blackburn and Darwen	—	29.0	—	22.2
Blackpool	—	30.0	—	24.1
Merseyside	27.2	27.0	20.9	21.0
Knowsley	28.1	27.7	22.6	21.7
Liverpool	27.0	26.6	20.9	21.4
St. Helens	27.6	27.6	20.1	20.0
Sefton	27.9	27.8	21.1	21.4
Wirral	26.4	26.2	20.7	20.6
Yorkshire and Humber	28.2	27.7	22.1	22.2
East Riding of Yorkshire	28.7	28.3	21.6	22.1
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	29.4	28.8	24.7	24.7
North East Lincolnshire	29.3	28.5	23.5	23.6
North Lincolnshire	28.6	26.5	23.3	23.0
York	27.8	26.9	21.2	21.1
North Yorkshire	26.8	26.6	21.0	21.2
Barnsley	29.1	28.6	23.4	23.8
Doncaster	28.2	28.1	21.5	21.6
Rotherham	27.9	27.2	21.9	22.0
Sheffield	26.9	26.5	23.0	22.8
Bradford	28.7	27.8	23.2	23.1
Calderdale	28.0	27.5	21.1	20.4
Kirklees	29.3	28.5	22.3	22.8
Leeds	28.2	27.9	20.7	20.7
Wakefield	28.7	28.3	22.5	23.1

Average class size of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools
Local Education Authority areas, January 1998 and 1999

	Primary		Secondary	
	1998	*1999*[1]	*1998*	*1999*[1]
East Midlands	28.0	27.6	21.7	21.8
Derby	29.8	28.1	21.8	21.9
Derbyshire	29.4	28.2	22.2	22.4
Leicester City	27.4	26.6	23.1	22.7
Rutland	25.6	25.8	23.8	23.3
Leicestershire	26.9	26.7	22.3	22.4
Lincolnshire	27.0	27.3	20.3	20.6
Northamptonshire	27.3	27.3	21.4	21.5
Nottinghamshire[2]	28.8	—	21.7	—
Nottinghamshire[1]	—	28.4	—	21.8
City of Nottingham	—	27.6	—	21.8
West Midlands	27.4	27.0	22.0	21.9
Hereford and Worcester	26.7	—	22.1	—
Herefordshire	—	25.4	—	25.1
Worcestershire	—	27.0	—	22.3
Shropshire[2]	27.3	—	22.0	—
Shropshire[1]	—	26.9	—	21.6
Telford and Wrekin	—	28.1	—	21.9
Stoke	27.1	26.9	22.9	23.2
Staffordshire	27.1	26.7	22.3	22.3
Warwickshire	28.5	27.6	21.9	21.6
Birmingham	27.6	27.4	21.6	21.5
Coventry	27.8	26.6	22.1	22.2
Dudley	26.7	26.6	22.8	22.5
Sandwell	28.5	27.5	21.6	21.4
Solihull	28.3	27.3	22.8	22.9
Walsall	26.6	26.1	21.4	21.2
Wolverhampton	27.1	27.3	20.9	21.1
Eastern	27.1	27.0	21.2	21.4
Luton	27.8	27.7	23.7	23.4
Bedfordshire	26.9	26.7	22.4	22.3
Cambridgeshire[2]	28.5	—	22.0	—
Cambridgeshire[1]	—	28.7	—	22.8
City of Peterborough	—	28.3	—	20.8
Essex[2]	27.6	—	21.7	—
Essex[1]	—	27.7	—	21.6
Southend	—	28.4	—	20.9
Thurrock	—	27.5	—	23.7
Hertfordshire	27.2	27.1	20.2	20.6
Norfolk	26.4	25.9	20.2	20.5
Suffolk	25.0	24.9	20.8	20.9
London	27.2	27.3	21.7	21.8
Inner London	26.5	26.7	22.3	22.5
City of London	24.8	24.7	0	0.0
Camden	27.0	26.8	19.5	20.2
Hackney	25.7	26.4	23.6	23.5
Hammersmith and Fulham	25.9	26.1	22.8	22.4
Haringey	27.3	27.3	21.6	21.0
Islington	27.1	26.9	23.9	23.6
Kensington and Chelsea	25.5	25.8	21.0	21.5
Lambeth	25.9	26.0	22.4	22.3
Lewisham	26.1	26.4	20.6	21.6
Newham	28.3	28.3	24.5	24.4
Southwark	26.6	26.8	22.4	23.2
Tower Hamlets	26.6	26.7	24.0	24.1
Wandsworth	25.6	26.0	22.2	22.8
Westminster	24.5	25.4	21.6	22.3
Outer London	27.6	27.5	21.4	21.5
Barking and Dagenham	27.0	27.2	21.9	21.9
Barnet	26.7	26.9	20.5	20.2
Bexley	29.1	28.3	21.9	21.4
Brent	26.5	27.1	20.2	20.0
Bromley	28.6	27.8	20.6	21.1

Average class size of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools Local Education Authority areas, January 1998 and 1999

	Primary		Secondary	
	1998	*1999*[1]	*1998*	*1999*[1]
Croydon	28.2	28.0	22.0	22.6
Ealing	27.3	27.1	22.2	22.4
Enfield	29.0	28.9	20.6	20.9
Greenwich	25.8	26.2	21.6	21.8
Harrow	27.5	27.3	23.5	23.4
Havering	28.0	28.2	21.7	22.7
Hillingdon	27.3	26.7	20.3	20.7
Hounslow	26.9	27.0	21.6	21.6
Kingston-upon-Thames	29.0	29.3	21.0	21.0
Merton	27.8	27.2	22.9	22.4
Redbridge	28.6	28.5	20.9	20.9
Richmond-upon-Thames	27.0	27.3	24.1	23.4
Sutton	27.8	27.9	20.7	21.2
Waltham Forest	26.8	27.0	22.9	23.5
South East	27.8	27.7	21.4	21.7
Berkshire	27.6	—	20.4	—
Bracknell Forest	—	27.8	—	20.7
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	—	26.6	—	21.3
West Berkshire	—	26.1	—	20.2
Reading	—	27.1	—	20.1
Slough	—	27.9	—	21.0
Wokingham	—	28.0	—	20.9
Milton Keynes	27.7	27.5	22.2	22.6
Buckinghamshire	28.1	27.9	21.0	21.6
Brighton and Hove	28.6	28.5	22.3	22.0
East Sussex	28.3	28.7	21.4	22.0
Portsmouth	27.9	28.2	22.8	23.2
Southampton	27.9	27.6	22.0	22.6
Hampshire	28.3	28.2	22.4	22.7
Isle of Wight	26.5	25.6	22.4	22.4
Kent[2]	28.2	—	20.4	—
Kent[3]	—	28.1	—	20.8
Medway	—	28.1	—	21.0
Oxfordshire	27.5	27.1	22.0	22.1
Surrey	26.7	26.9	21.6	22.2
West Sussex	27.0	27.2	21.6	21.4
South West	27.9	27.7	22.0	22.0
Bath and North East Somerset	26.8	27.4	20.8	21.0
City of Bristol	27.8	27.7	21.3	21.8
North Somerset	28.4	28.5	21.7	21.9
South Gloucestershire	28.7	28.0	21.7	21.5
Cornwall	27.6	27.9	22.4	22.3
Isles of Scilly	17.6	17.3	14.0	20.0
Devon[2]	28.0	—	21.7	—
Devon[3]	—	26.7	—	21.9
City of Plymouth	—	27.6	—	21.9
Torbay	—	28.6	—	21.2
Bournemouth	29.7	29.3	22.5	22.1
Poole	28.7	29.4	20.5	20.5
Dorset	27.5	27.0	22.5	22.0
Gloucestershire	27.5	27.5	21.7	21.2
Somerset	27.8	27.9	23.9	23.9
Swindon	29.4	28.9	23.6	23.6
Wiltshire	27.2	27.3	21.3	22.0

[1] Provisional
[2] Before Local Government re-organisation of April 1998
[3] After Local Government re-organisation of April 1998

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average size of single teacher reception classes in primary schools in January 1999 *(a)* in each local education authority and *(b)* in total; and what were the corresponding figures in January 1998. [80683]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Size of reception classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools by local education authority area in England. January 1998 and 1999

	1998			1999 (provisional)		
	Pupils	*Classes*	*Average class size*	*Pupils*	*Classes*	*Average class size*
England	484,530	18,763	25.8	485,925	19,096	25.4
North East	29,623	1,151	25.7	28,202	1,126	25.0
Hartlepool	868	35	24.8	938	39	24.1
Middlesbrough	2,015	79	25.5	1,952	74	26.4
Redcar and Cleveland	1,738	69	25.2	1,784	68	26.2
Stockton-on-Tees	2,522	94	26.8	1,918	78	24.6
Darlington	1,070	39	27.4	1,231	43	28.6
Durham	5,185	203	25.5	5,467	218	25.1
Northumberland	2,971	113	26.3	2,624	107	24.5
Gateshead	2,457	98	25.1	2,298	94	24.4
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	3,042	112	27.2	2,615	105	24.9
North Tyneside	2,315	90	25.7	2,138	84	25.5
South Tyneside	1,787	67	26.7	1,792	71	25.2
Sunderland	3,653	152	24.0	3,445	145	23.8
North West and Merseyside	78,305	2,933	26.7	75,598	2,934	25.8
North West	60,892	2,259	27.0	59,136	2,279	25.9
Cheshire[1]	9,814	385	25.5	—	—	—
Cheshire[2]	—	—	—	6,073	236	25.7
Halton	—	—	—	1,461	60	24.4
Warrington	—	—	—	2,346	91	25.8
Cumbria	4,153	162	25.6	4,288	174	24.6
Bolton	2,697	101	26.7	2,868	105	27.3
Bury	1,863	66	28.2	1,770	74	23.9
Manchester	5,668	217	26.1	5,791	223	26.0
Oldham	3,107	107	29.0	2,751	101	27.2
Rochdale	2,197	80	27.5	2,184	82	26.6
Salford	2,855	110	26.0	2,755	110	25.0
Stockport	3,413	127	26.9	3,312	130	25.5
Tameside	2,891	102	28.3	2,621	96	27.3
Trafford	2,745	100	27.5	2,583	99	26.1
Wigan	4,014	145	27.7	3,497	148	23.6
Lancashire[1]	15,475	557	27.8	—	—	—
Lancashire[2]	—	—	—	11,369	428	26.6
Blackburn and Darwen	—	—	—	1,845	66	28.0
Blackpool	—	—	—	1,622	56	29.0
Merseyside	17,413	674	25.8	16,462	655	25.1
Knowsley	2,240	86	26.0	2,102	80	26.3
Liverpool	5,971	231	25.8	5,465	220	24.8
St. Helens	2,188	85	25.7	2,216	84	26.4
Sefton	3,379	130	26.0	3,495	137	25.5
Wirral	3,635	142	25.6	3,184	134	23.8
Yorkshire and Humber	46,691	1,805	25.9	45,794	1,814	25.2
East Riding of Yorkshire	2,641	97	27.2	2,523	91	27.7
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	2,745	103	26.7	2,366	93	25.4
North East Lincolnshire	1,611	58	27.8	1,534	62	24.7
North Lincolnshire	1,441	51	28.3	1,366	60	22.8
York	1,194	52	23.0	1,497	62	24.1
North Yorkshire	3,905	154	25.4	3,722	148	25.1
Barnsley	2,110	87	24.3	1,741	75	23.2
Doncaster	3,266	120	27.2	3,311	123	26.9
Rotherham	1,915	90	21.3	2,168	99	21.9
Sheffield	3,640	160	22.8	3,765	172	21.9
Bradford	5,857	206	28.4	5,990	222	27.0
Calderdale	2,084	80	26.1	2,149	82	26.2
Kirklees	3,826	142	26.9	3,437	130	26.4
Leeds	8,216	306	26.8	7,870	294	26.8
Wakefield	2,240	99	22.6	2,355	101	23.3
East Midlands	29,491	1,190	24.8	29,964	1,244	24.1
Derby	1,789	71	25.2	1,935	85	22.8
Derbyshire	4,071	164	24.8	4,689	197	23.8
Leicester City	2,543	94	27.1	2,221	88	25.2
Rutland	145	7	20.7	150	6	25.0
Leicestershire	5,302	220	24.1	5,073	213	23.8
Lincolnshire	5,183	203	25.5	5,219	211	24.7
Northamptonshire	6,698	258	26.0	6,243	243	25.7

Size of reception classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools by local education authority area in England January 1998 and 1999

	1998			1999 (provisional)		
	Pupils	*Classes*	*Average class size*	*Pupils*	*Classes*	*Average class size*
Nottinghamshire	3,760	173	21.7	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	3,352	151	22.2
City of Nottingham	—	—	—	1,082	50	21.6
West Midlands	64,119	2,462	26.0	63,050	2,490	25.3
Hereford and Worcester	6,747	270	25.0	—	—	—
Herefordshire	—	—	—	1,405	58	24.2
Worcestershire	—	—	—	5,633	222	25.4
Shropshire	2,692	120	22.4	—	—	—
Shropshire	—	—	—	1,358	64	21.2
Telford and Wrekin	—	—	—	1,371	60	22.9
Stoke	3,165	121	26.2	3,029	121	25.0
Staffordshire	10,425	418	24.9	10,323	437	23.6
Warwickshire	5,352	201	26.6	5,147	204	25.2
Birmingham	14,676	550	26.7	14,924	551	27.1
Coventry	3,921	150	26.1	4,085	167	24.5
Dudley	3,453	128	27.0	3,462	130	26.6
Sandwell	4,581	164	27.9	3,395	132	25.7
Solihull	2,887	99	29.2	2,709	107	25.3
Walsall	3,393	137	24.8	3,275	130	25.2
Wolverhampton	2,827	104	27.2	2,934	107	27.4
Eastern	44,328	1,808	24.5	46,996	1,916	24.5
Luton	1,291	46	28.1	1,593	48	33.2
Bedfordshire	3,269	121	27.0	2,848	111	25.7
Cambridgeshire	6,805	255	26.7	—	—	—
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	5,166	194	26.6
City of Peterborough	—	—	—	1,868	72	25.9
Essex	15,389	630	24.4	—	—	—
Essex	—	—	—	13,203	540	24.5
Southend	—	—	—	1,935	75	25.8
Thurrock	—	—	—	1,601	67	23.9
Hertfordshire	7,934	343	23.1	8,666	379	22.9
Norfolk	5,832	234	24.9	6,038	241	25.1
Suffolk	3,808	179	21.3	4,078	189	21.6
Greater London	67,971	2,613	26.0	72,661	2,750	26.4
Inner London	23,641	940	25.2	26,285	1,014	25.9
City of London	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
Camden	1,168	43	27.2	1,283	48	26.7
Hackney	1,904	76	25.1	1,865	72	25.9
Hammersmith and Fulham	910	39	23.3	936	41	22.8
Haringey	2,449	87	28.1	2,463	90	27.4
Islington	1,726	64	27.0	1,782	69	25.8
Kensington and Chelsea	527	24	22.0	648	28	23.1
Lambeth	2,370	90	26.3	2,408	91	26.5
Lewisham	1,554	73	21.3	2,620	104	25.2
Newham	3,138	124	25.3	4,241	155	27.4
Southwark	2,943	115	25.6	3,017	119	25.4
Tower Hamlets	1,731	69	25.1	1,716	63	27.2
Wandsworth	2,313	91	25.4	2,320	91	25.5
Westminster	908	45	20.2	986	43	22.9
Outer London	44,330	1,673	26.5	46,376	1,736	26.7
Barking and Dagenham	2,285	85	26.9	2,275	82	27.7
Barnet	2,602	98	26.6	3,147	118	26.7
Bexley	2,803	100	28.0	2,915	109	26.7
Brent	2,722	101	27.0	2,941	105	28.0
Bromley	3,405	121	28.1	3,304	118	28.0
Croydon	4,178	150	27.9	4,078	147	27.7
Ealing	3,599	131	27.5	3,937	146	27.0
Enfield	3,133	108	29.0	3,214	111	29.0
Greenwich	1,767	85	20.8	1,797	83	21.7
Harrow	2,326	85	27.4	2,236	81	27.6
Havering	2,820	104	27.1	2,895	107	27.1
Hillingdon	1,390	61	22.8	1,076	52	20.7
Hounslow	2,363	87	27.2	2,640	92	28.7
Kingston-upon-Thames	1,257	46	27.3	1,386	47	29.5
Merton	1,424	58	24.6	1,397	59	23.7
Redbridge	2,102	85	24.7	2,446	93	26.3

Size of reception classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools by local education authority area in England, January 1998 and 1999

	1998			1999 (provisional)		
	Pupils	Classes	Average class size	Pupils	Classes	Average class size
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,412	49	28.8	1,365	48	28.4
Sutton	782	32	24.4	975	38	25.7
Waltham Forest	1,960	87	22.5	2,352	100	23.5
South East	75,423	2,926	25.8	76,059	2,951	25.8
Berkshire	4,266	180	23.7	—	—	—
Bracknell Forest	—	—	—	642	27	23.8
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	—	—	—	439	22	20.0
West Berkshire	—	—	—	813	41	19.8
Reading	—	—	—	529	24	22.0
Slough	—	—	—	1,031	39	26.4
Wokingham	—	—	—	838	37	22.6
Milton Keynes	2,439	90	27.1	2,110	84	25.1
Buckinghamshire	5,196	206	25.2	5,009	198	25.3
Brighton and Hove	2,277	81	28.1	2,547	92	27.7
East Sussex	4,353	171	25.5	4,832	185	26.1
Portsmouth	2,252	85	26.5	2,390	90	26.6
Southampton	2,844	109	26.1	2,232	87	25.7
Hampshire	13,999	516	27.1	13,616	499	27.3
Isle of Wight	1,373	57	24.1	1,308	57	22.9
Kent	15,979	604	26.5	—	—	—
Kent	—	—	—	12,946	493	26.3
Medway	—	—	—	3,045	113	26.9
Oxfordshire	2,829	120	23.6	2,820	127	22.2
Surrey	9,792	384	25.5	10,925	413	26.5
West Sussex	7,824	323	24.2	7,987	323	24.7
South West	48,579	1,875	25.9	47,601	1,871	25.4
Bath and North East Somerset	1,447	55	26.3	1,507	58	26.0
City of Bristol	4,004	149	26.9	4,105	152	27.0
North Somerset	1,795	69	26.0	1,758	68	25.9
South Gloucestershire	2,764	101	27.4	2,794	106	26.4
Cornwall	4,642	190	24.4	4,197	170	24.7
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0.0	0	0	0.0
Devon	11,034	423	26.1	—	—	—
Devon	—	—	—	6,542	279	23.4
City of Plymouth	—	—	—	3,122	123	25.4
Torbay	—	—	—	1,247	48	26.0
Bournemouth	1,389	51	27.2	1,252	44	28.5
Poole	1,671	57	29.3	1,266	43	29.4
Dorset	2,912	123	23.7	3,033	130	23.3
Gloucestershire	5,489	213	25.8	5,821	222	26.2
Somerset	5,144	197	26.1	5,499	215	25.6
Swindon	2,094	77	27.2	2,356	87	27.1
Wiltshire	4,194	170	24.7	3,102	126	24.6

Before Local Government re-organisation of April 1998.
After Local Government re-organisation of April 1998.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much of the windfall tax allocation for the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds was spent in 1998–99 in total; and what percentage of that total was spent on *(a)* administration of the scheme, *(b)* Gateway provision and *(c)* provision of options. [80679]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Final expenditure on the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds in 1998–99 is not yet available. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information is available and will place a copy of my letter in the Library.

School Budgets

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the local education authorities *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Wales whose aggregate schools budget will provide less funding in real terms per pupil in 1999–2000 than 1998–1999. [80678]

Ms Estelle Morris: Local education authorities are currently in the process of submitting details of their budget proposals for the financial year 1999–2000 to the Department. I will write to the hon. Member when the figures he requests are available, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library. These figures will also be published in the next few months, alongside tables showing the level of each local education authority's

expenditure on its schools. Responsibility for schools in Wales rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when were the deadlines for *(a)* the preparation of budgets under the fair funding system for their submission to his Department and *(b)* notifying schools of their budget share; and if he will list each local education authority in England that has failed to meet either of these deadlines. [80674]

Ms Estelle Morris: Local eduction authorities are required to publish their budget statements and to notify schools of their budget shares before the beginning of the financial year to which they relate. The following local authorities published their budget statements for the 1999–2000 financial year by the appointed time:

Barnet
Brent
Brighton and Hove
Kingston-upon-Hull
Kingston-upon-Thames
Redbridge
Southend
South Gloucestershire
Trafford.

Information about the dates on which local education authorities notify their schools of their budget shares is not collected centrally.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each local education authority in England for the most recent year for which information is available the total budgeted expenditure *(a)* within the local schools' budget and *(b)* within the individual school's budget. [80673]

Ms Estelle Morris: The local schools budget and individual schools budget are being introduced for the financial year 1999–2000. Local education authorities are currently in the process of submitting details of their budget proposals for 1999–2000 to the Department. I will write to the hon. Member when the figures he requests are available, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library. These figures will also be published in the next few months, alongside tables showing the level of each local education authority's expenditure on its schools.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will state for each local education authority in England for the financial year 1999–2000 the budgeted expenditure per pupil *(a)* within the local schools' budget and *(b)* within the individual school's budget. [80672]

Ms Estelle Morris: Local education authorities are currently in the process of submitting details of their budget proposals for the financial year 1999–2000 to the Department. I will write to the hon. Member when the figures he requests are available, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 16 April 1999

NORTHERN IRELAND

Euro

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) of 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *283*, what factors underlie her assessment that the impact of the euro on north-south relationships in the island of Ireland in the short term is likely to be limited. [80176]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Over the past two decades, North-South trade has been subject to exchange rate risk and business is therefore used to dealing with this. Many retail businesses in border areas currently transact using both currencies. Also the volume of North-South trade is unlikely to change significantly in the short term, due to the continuing importance of the Great Britain market to Northern Ireland.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list each of the new responsibilities which she will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80411]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Treaty of Amsterdam will have minimal impact on the responsibilities of the Department and its staffing.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the impact in Northern Ireland of the proposals in the Government's consultation paper, New and Renewable Energy-Prospects for the 21st Century. [80240]

Mr. Ingram: The Government intend working towards a target of renewable energy providing 10% of UK electricity supplies, cost effectively, as soon as possible; they hope to achieve this by 2010. So the proposals in the consultation paper will stimulate further interest in the potential of renewable technologies in Northern Ireland and complement the current range of initiatives such as the Northern Ireland Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation Orders (NI-NFFOs 1 and 2), the EU supported Energy Demonstration Scheme, the INTERREG programme and Northern Ireland Electricity's Eco Energy (Green Tariff) scheme. Following appraisal of the regional responses to the consultation paper, consideration will be given to the implications for sustained promotion of renewable technologies in Northern Ireland.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the public appointments for which her Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80756]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* The information requested is contained in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1998", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Since publication, the following public bodies have been created:

Body	*Date*	*Remuneration per annum*
The NI Human Rights Commission (its predecessor was the NI Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR))	1 March 1999	Chairman £55,000 Members £8,000
The Health and Safety Executive for NI (it replaces the Health and Safety Agency for NI)	1 April 1999	Chairman £15,000 Members £3,930

Administration of Justice (Databases)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list those public bodies concerned in the administration of justice which maintain computerised databases containing personal details and information about non-employees. [80609]

Mr. Ingram: Both the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Juvenile Justice Board (formerly Rathgael and Whiteabbey Training Schools Management Board) maintain a computerised database.

Firearms (Private Individuals)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the *(a)* numbers and *(b)* type of firearms officially registered or held by private individuals in Northern Ireland, indicating how many are for personal protection. [80454]

Mr. Ingram: At 31 December 1998 there were 139,588 firearms held by private individuals in Northern Ireland on foot of 84,553 firearms certificates issued by the Chief Constable. The breakdown of the firearms figures is as follows:

Firearm	*Number*
Shotguns and airguns	112,657 (90,548 and 22,109 respectively)
Rifles	14,254
Handguns	12,690 (including 9,605 personal protection firearms)
Miscellaneous	58 (mainly firearms used for the humane killing of animals)

Macpherson Report

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the Home Secretary's statement to the House on 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 389–403, *(a)* how she plans to respond to Sir William Macpherson's recommendations and *(b)* whether she will consider amending the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998. [80610]

Mr. Ingram: I have been considering the report into the brutal murder of Stephen Lawrence in the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. The Report focuses on the Metropolitan Police but it raises many issues for policing and, indeed, society generally. Many of the Lawrence Report's recommendations are pertinent in Northern Ireland, not only in terms of how racial differences are addressed, but also in terms of divisions along religious and other lines.

The Government attach great importance to issues of racial equality in Northern Ireland and, in the context of policing, I welcome the first meeting of the Consultative Committee on Policing for Ethnic Minorities hosted recently by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland and the RUC. This Committee will do much to ensure the views of ethnic minority groups are fully understood and their policing needs met. It will develop a greater understanding in the police service of the problems faced by ethnic minorities and provide a means by which these communities can work with the police to provide a better service and have their problems addressed.

The Criminal Justice and Policing section of the Good Friday Agreement recognises that we have a unique opportunity to bring about a society,

"which will recognise the full and equal legitimacy and worth of identifies, senses of allegiance and ethos of all sections of the community in Norther Ireland".

This is why the Government established the independent Commission on Policing and the Review of Criminal Justice which will report later this year. The terms of reference of these two bodies cover many areas highlighted by the report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

None the less, there are a number of areas where I will want to see comparable changes to those set out in my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's action plan for addressing the recommendations of the Lawrence Report. On the application of not only race relations legislation, but all Northern Ireland's stringent equality legislation to the police, I want to see as full a coverage as possible. Northern Ireland is already a leader in providing statutory guarantees of equality of treatment and I want to build on this.

Improving community confidence in policing generally is an essential priority. The Police Authority has set an objective in the recently published Policing Plan requiring the Chief Constable to raise public confidence in the RUC in the year 1999–2000. However, in view of the recommendations contained in the Lawrence Report, I will examine with the Authority and the Chief Constable what more might be needed to promote racial, religious, sex and disability equality and what meaningful measures can be adopted to ensure this happens. There should be no doubt of the Government's commitment to tackling all forms of discrimination.

Turning to the recommendations which affect police complaints and discipline procedure, we are making important changes. On independent investigations we are pressing ahead with the establishment of a Police Ombudsman. This will provide for completely independent investigation of complaints against the police and will provide a model for other systems. We want this system to be as transparent as possible. We will also be introducing important reforms of the police conduct and performance procedures and will consider the further changes recommended by the Lawrence Report in this area.

Whilst first-aid training in the RUC generally meets the standards recommended by the report, we are in touch with the RUC to ensure that any steps necessary to reduce intervals between refresher training are advanced as a matter of urgency. In other aspects of training, the police will build upon the initiatives taken as part of the Community Awareness Programme which already uses outside trainers from a wide variety of organisations. On inspection, similar changes to the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary will be made in Northern Ireland in line with those being made by the Home Secretary.

The Report raises issues about communication between the prosecuting authorities and victims. In Northern Ireland victims or their families are informed about the progress of their case by the RUC at key stages during the process, and by staff of the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland if any decisions are taken once the case has actually come to court. The experience of those victims and witnesses who are made to feel particularly vulnerable because of the nature of the offence they are giving evidence about has been considered by a working group since last May. The group will be making recommendations to me in the Summer as to how the criminal justice system might better assist such witnesses.

The Stephen Lawrence Report highlights the need for co-ordinated action across the public sector if reforms are to be truly effective. For this reason the Government will be seeking to work closely with the new Assembly in Northern Ireland on those recommendations dealing with education and equality law. Consultation with bodies outside central Government will also be required. I have already initiated this action.

The Government consider the protection of human rights, equality of treatment and respect for difference cultures as fundamental aspects of the ethos of the police service in Northern Ireland. A service where, as the Chief Constable has indicated, there is no room for prejudice of any kind and cultural diversity is celebrated. The recommendations of the Report on Stephen Lawrence will help us in pursuing this aim.

Irish-Medium Schools

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the Irish-medium *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools and state the number of pupils enrolled in each at the start of the current school year. [80611]

Mr. McFall: The information requested is as follows:

Primary	*Pupils*
Bunscoil Phobal Feirste	332
Bunscoil Na Fuiseoige	77
Bunscoil Na Bhfal	187
Bunscoil Cholmicille	218
Bunscoil An Tsleibhe Dhuibh	118
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain	82
Bunscoil An Iuir	60
Bunscoil Larigh	31
Bunscoil Ui Neill	35
Bunscoil An Droichead	31
Bunscoil Dhal Riada	18
Secondary	
Meanscoil Feirste	268
Meanscoil	65

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many school pupils were being taught in the Irish language medium in each year since 1985. [80612]

Mr. McFall: Information on the number of pupils taught in Irish Medium schools is as follows:

Year	*Pupils*
1985–86	198
1986–87	253
1987–88	304
1988–89	339
1989–90	370
1990–91	378
1991–92	400
1992–93	527
1993–94	771
1994–95	847
1995–96	1,038
1996–97	1,167
1997–98	1,375
1998–99	1,522

Figures on pupils in Irish medium units in English medium schools are not available.

Arrest Warrants

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 9 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *125*, on arrest warrants, if she will list the definition and procedural arrangements for review for each of the five categories of arrest warrant and indicate what bodies might constitute the issuing authority in each case; how many extradition warrants were issued to which countries in each of the last 20 years; and how many warrants led to successful extradition. [80613]

Mr. Ingram: Bench/Arrest warrants and Extradition warrants are issued by an RM or a JP and remain current until executed or withdrawn. There is no statutory requirement to periodically refer back to the issuing authority. The term "Extradition Warrant" includes, inter alia, an arrest warrant issued:

(a) by JPs under Article 20 of the Magistrates Courts (NI) Order 1981; or

(b) by Crown Court judges; or

(c) by JPs under Section 72 of the Criminal Justice Act 1967 which seek the arrears of convicted persons who have escaped from or are otherwise unlawfully at large from prison.

Committal warrants and Distress warrants are issued by an RM or JP or Clerk of Petty Sessions and are required to be returned to the issuing authority for cancellation or re-issue if they have not been executed within a reasonable time determined by reference to the circumstances of each case. Enforcement of Judgement warrants are issued by the Chief Enforcement Officer and are cancelled or re-issued if not executed within 12 months.

The following table reflects the number of extradition requests made to foreign jurisdictions since 1979 (per person sought). The figures do not show the number of warrants issued in respect of each person as on many occasions a large number of warrants could be issued for the one individual.

Country	*Persons sought*	*Successful extraditions*
USA	8	[1]1
Holland	2	2
France	1	—
Germany	1	1
Republic of Ireland	238	106

[1]4 on-going

Note:

Formal records were not kept in this format prior to 1990. Figures before 1990 have been compiled from other sources and may therefore be subject to amendment.

HMP Maghaberry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will request HM Inspector of Prisons to investigate assaults and arson attacks on prison officers at HMP Maghaberry. [80602]

Mr. Ingram: No.

I am satisfied that any assaults or arson attacks which have occurred at HMP Maghaberry, have been fully investigated by the Governor and his staff and appropriate remedial action taken. I shall not, therefore, be requesting HM Inspector of Prisons to investigate.

Fair Employment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what form and where *(a)* complaints made under fair employment legislation, *(b)* friendly settlements and *(c)* decisions of the Fair Employment Tribunal are listed. [80604]

Mr. Ingram: Complaints to the Fair Employment Tribunal made under the Fair Employment legislation are entered in a public register.

Decisions of a Fair Employment Tribunal are held in a separate public register. Both registers are available for inspection at the Office of the Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal.

There is no obligation on those who settle to provide or publish information on that settlement. However, settlements between the parties in cases conciliated by the Labour Relations Agency are also recorded in the decision register and the Fair Employment Commission also includes in its Annual Reports details of settlements in which it was involved.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance is available for employers to maintain a computerised record of monitoring under Fair Employment legislation and what assessment she has made of the practicality of developing a dedicated software package for these purposes. [80605]

Mr. Ingram: No assistance is currently available for employers to maintain a computerised record of monitoring under Fair Employment legislation. An assessment has not been made of the practicality of developing a dedicated software package for these purposes. However, a number of private sector concerns have developed dedicated software packages to assist employers maintain monitoring records.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions in each year since 1990 the Fair Employment Commission has acted on section 33(3) of the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 in *(a)* serving a notice containing directions under section 34 and *(b)* making an application to the tribunal under section 16. [80606]

Mr. Ingram: Since 1990 the Fair Employment Commission has not issued any notices under Section 33(3) of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 and consequently no action has been required under Section 34 to serve a notice containing directions not to make an application to the Tribunal under Section 16.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions in each year since 1990 *(a)* the Fair Employment Commission has served a notice under section 36(2) of the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 concerning goals and timetables and *(b)* a person has been (i) prosecuted and (ii) found guilty of an offence under section 36(7). [80607]

Mr. Ingram: The Fair Employment Commission has not issued any notices concerning goals and timetables under Section 36(2) of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 and hence there have been no prosecutions.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions in each year since 1990 *(a)* the Fair Employment Commission has issued a notice under section 38 of the Fair Employment Act (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 stating an employer is not qualified under the Act and *(b)* an employer has won an appeal against such a decision. [80608]

Mr. Ingram: Since 1990 just one employer has been served with a not qualified notice under Section 38 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. This was in 1991. Subsequently the required monitoring return was made and the notice was revoked. No employer has appealed.

SCOTLAND

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80528]

Mr. McLeish: The Scottish Office is currently considering the implications for Scotland of the recommendations of the Macpherson Inquiry. Our intention is to publish an action plan as soon as possible. From 1 July 1999 this will be a mater for the Scottish Parliament.

I also refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *14b*.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Employment Tribunal Service

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets he has set the Employment Tribunal Service for 1999–2000. [81477]

Mr. Byers: I have set the following targets for the ETS for 1999–2000.

To bring to a first hearing at least 85 per cent. of single employment tribunal cases within 26 weeks of receipt;

In relation to the above target, all employment tribunal offices to achieve at least 75 per cent.;

To issue at least 85 per cent. of decisions within 4 weeks of the final hearing;

To reduce administrative unit costs in the employment tribunals by 5 per cent. in real terms;

At least 80 per cent. of employment tribunal users to express satisfaction, in surveys, with the service offered by the ETS;

At least 90 per cent. of appeals registered by the Employment Appeal Tribunal for preliminary hearing to be ready for listing within 6 weeks.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 31 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *803*, on structural funds, when he expects to be able to indicate what the EU structural fund allocation to the United Kingdom will be in each of the years 2000 to 2004. [80593]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* Following the agreement at the Berlin European Council, the Commission have yet to indicate when they will be able to inform Member States of what their individual EU Structural Fund allocation will be for the years 2000 to 2006. Until that time, the Government are not in a position to say how much the UK will receive.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what will be the allocation for *(a)* structural funds and *(b)* cohesion funds in the EU in 2000 expressed in 1999 prices; and what percentage of EU-15 GDP in 2000 this will represent. [80590]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* At Berlin, it was concluded that the total amount available for commitments under the Structural Funds for the year 2000 will be 29,430 million euros (1999 prices), and for the Cohesion Fund it will be 2,615 million euros (1999 prices). This equates to about 0.4 per cent. of EU-15 GDP in the year 2000.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 31 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *803*, on EU structural funds if he will express the sum of 11,990 million euro in sterling, indicating the rates of exchange used. [80591]

Mr. Byers: 11,990 million euro equates to £8,790 million using an £/euro exchange rate of £1 = 1.364 euro (the average rate from 1995 to date).

Assisted Areas Map

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the reviewed assisted areas map; and if he will make a statement. [80265]

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the assisted areas map at the same time as it is submitted to the European Commission; and if he will make a statement. [80592]

Mr. Wills: Ministers are currently considering what proposals they will put forward. They will be published as soon as possible.

Inward Investment

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the work he has done to secure *(a)* Korean and *(b)* Japanese inward investment into the United Kingdom. [81098]

Mr. Wills: The Invest in Britain Bureau (IBB), which is jointly managed by DTI and FCO, works to secure the UK's position as the number one European location for Japanese and Korean investment. IBB runs a programme of company visits (900 in Japan, 220 in Korea in 1998–99), promotional seminars, media campaigns and inward missions aimed at attracting inward investment, as well as working closely with existing investors alongside the UK Development Agencies.

The Ministerial teams in both Departments support this, both here in the UK and when travelling overseas. For example, I recently met senior representatives of Honda Motors and intend to meet other Japanese and Korean companies located here.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79640]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*.

Parliamentary Private Secretaries are bound by the requirements of the Ministerial Code when attending any meetings in an official or semi-official capacity.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the likely implications of the cultivation of genetically modified crops for the volume of pesticides used; and what studies he has commissioned on this matter. [74868]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* A scientific review of the impact of genetically modified crops on herbicide use was published by the Pesticides Safety Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 15 December 1998.

Pesticide use has been monitored by MAFF's Pesticides Usage Survey Group for over thirty years. Discussions will be taking place in the near future to decide how this group's monitoring activities can be enhanced to monitor and provide information on the use of pesticides on genetically modified crops.

The farm-scale evaluations into the ecological effects of genetically modified crops being set up by my Department, MAFF and Scottish Office will also provide information on herbicide use on genetically modified crops compared to conventional equivalent crops and the comparative impact of the different herbicide regimes on farmland wildlife.

CO_2 Emissions

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what is the estimated annual reduction in CO_2 emissions in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2005 and *(c)* 2010 from continuing the duty escalator on road fuels; [77839]

(2) what is the estimated annual reduction in CO_2 emissions in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2005 and *(c)* 2010 from the increase in hydrocarbon duties on road fuels implemented in the 1999 Budget. [77838]

Dr. Reid: The fuel duty escalator is a long-term strategy introduced by the last Government whose impact on transport emissions can be expected to build up over time.

The escalator is also part of a package of measures to reduce emissions, particularly of CO_2, through the promotion of fuel efficiency and reduced congestion. Taken on its own, increasing fuel duty by six per cent. per annum in real terms between 1996 and 2002 is currently estimated to reduce 2010 road traffic CO_2 emissions by between 2 and 5 million tonnes of carbon, as set out in the Climate Change Consultation Paper.

Estimates of the incremental contribution of a single year's duty increases towards the savings estimated for the strategy as a whole are even more difficult. On average, however, we calculate that each year of the

escalator contributes between 0.3 and 0.75 million tonnes towards the savings estimated in 2010 for the strategy as a whole.

Multi-modal Study

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the terms of reference and areas of study are for the London to Reading multi-modal study. [80022]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The London to Reading multi-modal study is included in the second tranche of the multi-modal studies programme announced last month; work on which will start in 2000–01. The Government Office for the South East will set up a steering group to include representatives from the South East Regional Planning conference (SERPLAN), and other regional and transport interests, to determine the terms of reference for the study and to take the study forward.

The London to Reading study will also take into account any emerging findings from the London to South West and the South Wales multi-modal study, which is included in tranche one of the studies programme and will start in 1999–2000.

PFI Credits

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the allocation of PFI credits for the proposed Baldock bypass; [79788]

(2) in what circumstances a local authority may bid for the allocation of PFI credits in respect of more than one major transport project; [79787]

(3) if Hertfordshire County Council is limited to submitting only one major project bid for PFI credits; and if he will make a statement; [79791]

(4) to what extent the *(a)* population, *(b)* level of car ownership and *(c)* scale of transport problems in a highway authority area are taken into account in setting the number of major schemes per authority which will be approved for the allocation of PFI credits; and if he will make a statement. [79786]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The level of resources likely to be available for major transport projects during the 5-year period covered by Local Transport Plans is such that it is likely that there will be a significant number of plans for which no scheme is approved. Against this background there would need to be exceptional circumstances to justify approving more than one scheme in any one plan. No authority is precluded from submitting more than one scheme but they should consult their Government Office before doing so. All bids will be considered on their merits in line with the policies referred to in the guidance issued to local authorities.

Any bid that Hertfordshire may make for a Baldock Bypass will be considered on this basis.

Gaul

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Marine Accident Investigation Branch report of their survey of the 'Gaul' will be published; and what are his intentions regarding the reopening of the formal investigation into the loss of the vessel. [81161]

Mr. Prescott: The Marine Accidents Investigation Branch report is published today. The Chief Inspector recommends that there is new and important evidence meriting the reopening of the Formal Investigation into the loss of the vessel. I have today ordered the reopening of the Formal Investigation in full before a Wreck Commissioner.

I have also decided that my Department will support an application to the Wreck Commissioner that the reasonable costs of a single legal team to represent the interests of the relatives of those lost with the vessel at the reopened investigation should be met from public funds.

Mr. Roger Clarke, a senior official from my Department, will investigate why no searches were made for the Gaul after she sank. His results will be published. Mr. Clarke, assisted by a forensic scientist and forensic pathologist, will undertake the location and examination of three unidentified bodies found in Northern Russia following the loss of the vessel.

DEFENCE

Drugs Operations

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times in each of the last five years his Department's personnel have been involved in counter-drugs operations; which units were involved; and what was the cost above normal expenditure for the operations. [80712]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary gave to him on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *504–05*. The operational details of counter-drugs support to HM Customs and Excise are sensitive and I am withholding the identities of the units involved in accordance with exemptions 1 and 4 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The additional costs incurred by MOD in these operations are typically in the region of £70–140k, depending upon the duration of the task and the extent of military involvement. These costs are recovered from HM Customs and Excise. There are no additional costs incurred by the West Indies Guard Ship in carrying out counter-drugs tasks in the Caribbean.

Personnel Records

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the headings or fields of information under which his Department's databases record personal details of serving and former members of HM armed forces. [80614]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Personal details of serving and former members of the armed forces are held on a variety of databases which contain a large number of different headings or fields of information. In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1984, details of the Ministry of Defence's use of personal data are contained within the

Data Protection Register. The Register entry shows the purposes for which data are held by the Department and for each purpose:

(a) the types of individuals about whom data are held;

(b) the classes of personal data held;

(c) where the data are obtained from;

(d) who the data may be disclosed to;

(e) any countries outside the UK where the personal data may be sent.

Our Register entry covers both civilian and Service personnel. A list of headings or fields of information particular to databases used for recording personal details of serving and former members of the armed forces is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Data Protection Register is publicly available from the Data Registrar's website on http://www.dpr.gov.uk. The Ministry of Defence's Register Entry is G0626166.

Air Defence Exercise (Central Europe)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the cost of the air defence exercise in central Europe carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72788]

(2) how many personnel were deployed on the air defence exercise in central Europe carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; and which countries had armed forces involved in the exercise. [72798]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Exercise Central Enterprise was the major annual NATO exercise held in central Europe in the period specified. The countries that participated in the flying activity were Belgium, Turkey, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, Italy, Denmark, the USA and the UK. The total number of personnel involved in Central Enterprise is not available, nor are the national costs to other participating nations. Twenty RAF personnel were detached to participate in the exercise, with an additional cost to the RAF in the order of £20K. I understand from NATO that the cost to NATO Exercise Funds was some £41K.

Service Personnel (Sick Leave)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel were on sick leave when their service with the armed forces ended in each of the last three years. [80696]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Details of the number of Service personnel deemed to be on sick leave at any one time are not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Technically, however, Service personnel are not deemed to be on sick leave at the time of discharge, as they qualify for "terminal leave", or "invalidity leave" if being discharged for medical reasons.

Sick Pay

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the amount of statutory sick pay which his Department would have been able to claim from the Department of Social Security in each of the last three years if service personnel were eligible for statutory sick pay. [80697]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My Department does not maintain records of the numbers of Service personnel deemed to be on sick leave at any one time and could only provide that information at disproportionate cost. However, under the Statutory Sick Pay Act 1994, payment of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) became the responsibility of employers and the ability for them to reclaim up to 80 per cent. of costs from the Department of Social Security ceased. Employers were compensated for the extra SSP costs by a reduction in employers' National Insurance Contributions. No estimate has therefore been made of any amount which would notionally have been recoverable.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Department of Social Security concerning the eligibility of service personnel for statutory sick pay. [80699]

Mr. Doug Henderson: None. Service personnel are not covered by Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) regulations on the basis that they remain on full pay during periods of sickness, which would exceed any amount payable under the SSP scheme.

Nuclear Accident Response

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent in each of the last five years on nuclear accident response; and if he will list the incidents and the cost involved with each. [80709]

Mr. Doug Henderson: There have been no incidents requiring nuclear accident response over the last five years and therefore no costs have been incurred. However, defence nuclear accident response capabilities are maintained in appropriate divisions within the Department and are regularly exercised. Costs associated are borne by those divisions and no central record is maintained. Such a record could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost in each of the last five years of his Department's search and rescue capability in the UK. [80713]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The figures requested for the search and rescue capability are as follows:

	£ million
1995–96	33.493
1996–97	34.058
1997–98	35.079
1998–99	36.066

Figures are not readily available for financial year 1994–95, although they are not expected to differ substantially from 1995–96 (appropriately reduced to take account of inflation).

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the link between

exposure to depleted uranium and the development of cancer in Gulf War veterans; and if he will make a statement. [81048]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer my hon. Friend to paragraphs 7–19 and 31 of the detailed paper "Testing for the presence of depleted uranium in UK veterans of the Gulf conflict: The Current Position", which I published on 19 March. A copy of the paper was sent to my hon. Friend on the date of its publication and copies were also placed in the Library of the House.

In addition, the Ministry of Defence is funding a major epidemiological study, led by Professor Nicola Cherry at Manchester University, which aims to determine whether Gulf veterans are experiencing greater ill-health than service personnel who did not take part in the conflict and to identify possible exposures and predisposing factors associated with any distinctive pattern of symptoms which may be found. This study will also investigate whether there is an increased incidence of cancer or mortality amongst Gulf veterans. Initial results are expected to be submitted for publication at around the middle of this year.

Royal Armoured Corps Pool of Officers

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what criteria were used in deciding to disband the Royal Armoured Corps Pool of Officers; [80687]

(2) what steps he has taken to replace the specialist armoured skills and experience at junior commander level which had been provided by the Royal Armoured Corps Pool of Officers. [80689]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Within the reforms of the Territorial Army, the operational requirement for the Royal Armoured Corps (RAC) is to produce trained individual reservists to provide crewmen for Challenger 2 tanks and medium reconnaissance vehicles, and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) specialists. Against this background, there is no longer an operational requirement for an RAC pool of ex-regular officers since there will be sufficient expertise available within the new unit structure, and the Regular Army Retired Officers (RARO) will provide a continued source of specialist armoured skills and experience.

Mr. Nicholas Davies

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will *(a)* set out his reasons for issuing an injunction on 23 February 1998 concerning plans for publication of a book to have been entitled "Ten Thirty Three", by Mr. Nicholas Davies, and *(b)* ensure that no investigation or inquiry into the death of solicitor Patrick Finucane is prevented from having access to unpublished material that is in Mr. Davies's possession. [80601]

Mr. Doug Henderson: An injunction was sought (and subsequently granted) because the manuscript contained material which, had it entered the public domain, would have been damaging to national security and could have posed serious risks to the safety of individuals referred to in the book.

The murder of Patrick Finucane was investigated both by the RUC and subsequently by the investigation team led by John Stevens, then Deputy Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire. In the event of any future investigation into this case my Department would co-operate fully as we did with the earlier investigations including, where appropriate, over information held by third parties. In doing so the Ministry of Defence would continue to take into account our continuing duty to safeguard national security and the safety of individuals.

HEALTH

Restraint Techniques

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *3*, on restraint techniques, if he will publish the figures on deaths in mental health institutions held by the Mental Health Act Commission; and if he will provide a breakdown by ethnicity. [80664]

Mr. Hutton: The data for the year ending 31 January 1999 on deaths of patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 have not yet been validated. The Mental Health Act Commission is currently in discussion with a number of academic bodies about the validation process. The Commission will then be in a position to publish the data and to provide a breakdown by ethnicity.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *3*, on restraint techniques, what guidance his Department has issued to trusts on what constitutes appropriate staffing levels and policies. [80663]

Mr. Hutton: We have issued no guidance specifically in relation to restraint techniques.

Chapter 19 of the Mental Health Act 1983 Code of Practice makes clear that hospitals should have written operational policies on all forms of restraint. It is for trusts to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of these policies and to determine appropriate staffing in accordance with the needs of patients.

European Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 when his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee unofficial texts of draft European legislation; [80553]

(2) on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee Council working documents. [80546]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The Department receives a large volume of both official and unofficial/working texts during the course of negotiations on European Union legislation. In order to facilitate the work of the European Scrutiny Committee and to keep it informed of the progress of negotiations, the Department

regularly submits Explanatory Memoranda to the Committee. Since 1 May 1997, the Department has made no Council working documents available to the Committee and has made unofficial texts available on eight occasions:

17 June 1997:

Proposal for a Council Directive on health protection of individuals against the dangers of ionising radiation in relation to medical exposures, replacing Directive 84–466/Euratom.

28 November 1997:

Council Resolution concerning the report on the state of women's health in the European Community.

4 December 1997:

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on in vitro diagnostic medical devices.

2 April 1998:

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adopting a programme of Community action from 1999–2003 on rare diseases in the context of the framework for action in the field of public health.

2 April 1998:

Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision adopting a programme of Community action from 1999–2003 on pollution-related diseases in the context of the framework for action in the field of public health.

20 April 1998:

Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the suitability of blood and plasma donors and the screening of donated blood in the European Community.

2 October 1998:

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on in vitro diagnostic medical devices.

9 November 1999:

Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Council Regulation (EC) 297/95 on fees payable to the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products.

Guy's and St. Thomas's NHS Trust

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the new chair of the Guy's and St. Thomas's NHS Trust was (i) appointed and (ii) told of her appointment; on what date the Trust was told of her appointment; on what date information was given by the NHS of the name of the person appointed; how many and which hon. Members discussed the appointment with Ministers during March, indicating the dates of the discussions; and for what reason the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey was not invited to discuss the appointment with Ministers. [80566]

Mr. Denham: Mrs. Patricia Moberly has been appointed as chair of the Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospital National Health Service Trust for the period from 1 April 1999 until 31 October 2002. Ministers reached their decision on 18 March and Mrs. Moberly was told of the appointment by the regional chairman on 19 March. The trust chief executive was told shortly afterwards. The decision was formally announced in a press release issued by the London Regional Office of the NHS Executive on 26 March and in an internal bulletin at the trust on the same day. On 24 February the regional chairman invited all local hon. Members to give their views by 7 March on the candidates for the chairmanship. No written replies were received by the deadline but a number of hon. Members made informal representations directly to Ministers. The hon. Member, for Southwark, North and Bermondsey sent a letter giving his views on 17 March. These were fully considered before the appointment decision was made.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who has been appointed to chair the Guy's and St. Thomas's NHS Trust from 1 April; how many shortlisted nominees were proposed by the regional office; how many others were Labour party members; and how many had served on NHS trust boards before 1 April as (i) chairmen and (ii) deputy chairmen. [80564]

Mr. Denham: Mrs. Patricia Moberly has been appointed to serve as chair of the Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospitals National Health Service Trust for the period from 1 April 1999 until 31 October 2002. Two other candidates for the chairmanship were put forward by the regional chairman for consideration by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. All three candidates had served as non-executive board members, Mrs. Moberly on the board of the Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospitals NHS Trust. One other candidate had served as a chair of another NHS Trust, and the remaining one as a vice-chairman of the Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospitals NHS Trust. Candidates for such posts are not required to declare party membership.

Junior Football Staff

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is intended that county football associations and junior football clubs shall have access to the register to be established under the Protection of Children Bill when considering the appointment of staff to work with junior footballers. [79910]

Mr. Hutton: The vast majority of such clubs should have access to the list provided that they are "organisations" within the meaning of the Bill, and the post to which the individual is to be appointed meets the definition of "child care position" as set out in the Bill.

Residential Care (Bedfordshire)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the compliance with the relevant registration standards of *(a)* nursing homes and *(b)* residential homes within mid-Bedfordshire. [80481]

Mr. Hutton: None. Residential care homes within the whole of Bedfordshire are registered and inspected by the Registration and Inspection Unit of Bedfordshire County Council. The registration and inspection of nursing homes within Bedfordshire is the responsibility of Bedfordshire Health Authority. Residential care homes and nursing homes are subject to the Registered Homes Act 1984.

Multiple Sclerosis

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will recommend to health purchasers that the new provisions for pooled budgets and lead commissioning be implemented in the case of multiple sclerosis patients. [80596]

Mr. Hutton: There is no restriction on the client groups that can benefit from the new provisions. It is for health and local government partners to agree how best to

provide services to meet the needs of people in their area. The new provisions give authorities the flexibility to do this and the opportunity to consider innovative new arrangements. Directing authorities, in the first instance, on how to use the flexibilities would run counter to this. However, as the flexibilities start to bed down and lessons are learnt we will wish to spread good practice.

Methadone

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost to the NHS in each of the past five years of methadone prescriptions; and from which companies they were purchased. [80600]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* The net ingredient cost of prescription items dispensed in the community in England from 1993 to 1997 for methadone hydrochloride is shown in the table.

The majority of items for methadone hydrochloride are prescribed generically. Details of the manufacturers of drugs dispensed against these prescriptions are not known. Items prescribed by their branded names include products manufactured by Glaxo Wellcome, Martindale, Rosemont and Link.

Net ingredient cost (NIC) of prescription items dispensed in the community for methadone hydrochloride, 1993–1997

Year	*£000*
England	
1993	6,803.6
1994	7,993.9
1995	9,086.9
1996	9,912.1
1997	10,668.2

Notes:
1. The figures cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.
2. The net ingredient cost (NIC) is the basic cost of a drug and does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charge income.
3. Methadone hydrochloride is contained in the following British National Formulary sections: BNF 3.9.1—Cough suppressants; BNF 4.7.2—Opioid analgesics; BNF 4.10—Drugs used in substance dependence.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those people appointed chairman or non-executive director of an NHS trust or health authority since 1 May 1997 who are the spouse or partner of an elected local councillor, stating the party affiliation of the councillor in each case; [80931]

(2) if he will list those people appointed chairman or non-executive director of NHS trusts or health authorities since 1 May 1997 who are the spouse or partner of an hon. Member stating the party affiliation of the hon. Member in each case. [80932]

Mr. Denham: No spouses or partners of hon. Members have been appointed as non-executive directors of National Health Service trusts or health authorities since the Government took office. Information on any such relationships between non-executive directors and elected local councillors is not collected by the Department.

Listening to Women Roadshows

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *415–18*, if he will list the women's organisations which have been invited to send representatives to the Listening to Women roadshows at *(a)* Newcastle, *(b)* Reading, *(c)* Leeds and *(d)* Nottingham. [80898]

Ms Jowell: In addition to organisations, we are publicising the event to individual women not involved in public life. To this end we have invited women who had previously contacted the Women's Unit; published articles in the local press, with an open invitation for local women to attend; publicised the event on local radio; asked local job centres to issue invitations to female jobseekers in the area; and been in liaison with the Commission for Racial Equality for them to suggest interested women.

To date the following organisations have been invited to send representatives to the Listening to Women meeting in Newcastle on 19 April 1999:

1. Fair Play North East Ltd.
2. Northern Region Youth and Community Unit
3. Young Women's Group
4. Rosehill Young Women's Project
5. South Tyneside Multi Cultural Project
6. Muslim Women's Association
7. Breast Care and Mastectomy Group
8. Sahali
9. Roshni Women's Centre
10. Age Concern
11. Apnar Ghar
12. Working for Women
13. Women of the North
14. South Bank Women's Centre
15. Newcastle Literacy Collaborative
16. Them Wifies
17. Tyneside Women's Health Project
18. Newcastle upon Tyne Guide Association
19. The Star Centre Ltd.
20. Newcastle Youth Women's Project
21. East End Women's Activity Group
22. West Newcastle Women
23. Scotswood Community Project. Women's Group
24. Elswick Girls Project
25. TWAFA
26. Pre-School Play Group Association
27. East End Parent and Toddler Forum
28. WAG
29. Chopwell Community Centre
30. Felling Community Centre
31. Gateshead Young Women's Outreach Project
32. Interface Project
33. Leam Lane Community Centre
34. Lobley Hill Youth and Community Centre
35. Streets Ahead
36. Community Education Officer
37. Local Initiatives Team
38. Alnwick Voluntary Action
39. Chester-le-Street Volunteer Bureau

40. Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service
41. Sunderland Council for Voluntary Service
42. Tynedale Voluntary Action
43. Acomb Crescent
44. Northumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust
45. Northumbria Probation Service
46. Ringtons Ltd.
47. Regency Care Homes Ltd.
48. South Tyneside College
49. TSL Group (Staff Pension Scheme)
50. Tynedale District Council.

To date the following organisations have been invited to send representatives to the Listening to Women meeting in Reading on Friday 21 May 1999:

1. Reading Women's Information Centre
2. In Touch Helpline
3. Women's Open House
4. JSJS Black Women's Group
5. East Reading Adventure Playground "Strictly Girls"
6. Reading Muslim Women's Association
7. Electrical Association for Women
8. Girls Friendly Society
9. Reading Women's Education Project
10. Reading Women's Gas Federation
11. Sonning Common Women's Group
12. West Indian Women's Circle
13. Black Women's Group
14. Disabled Housing Trust
15. MIND Drop in Centre
16. Earley Women's Institute
17. Soroptimist International
18. British Federation of University Women
19. Berkshire Women's Aid
20. Abbey Women's Clinic
21. Domestic Violence Forum
22. Bulmershe College Women's Group
23. Kennet Valley Free Church Women's Council
24. National Register of Women
25. Reading Cav. Heights Townswomen's Guild
26. Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes
27. Reading University Women's group
28. Life Pregnancy Care Centre
29. Churches in Reading Women's Centre
30. Padworth W.I.
31. Caversham W.I.
32. Maiden Erlegh W.I.
33. National Register of Women
34. Sahara Asian Women's Project
35. Racal-Mobilcal Ltd.
36. Honeywell Control Systems Ltd.
37. Yellow Pages
38. Prudential Assurance Co. Ltd.
39. De La Rue Plc
40. Reading College and School of Art and Design
41. University of Reading
42. Gyosei International College.

The invitations to the Leeds and Nottingham meetings will be issued shortly.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if disabled people and their organisations will have specific representation on the board of the newly-established National Institute for Clinical Excellence. [80930]

Mr. Hutton: No organisations or groups have specific representation on the board of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). The board is a management body, whose purpose is to manage the functions and business of NICE.

NICE has a partners' council, which includes representatives drawn from key stakeholder communities in the NHS, including people with disabilities and their organisations.

PRIME MINISTER

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to exclude sufferers of cystic fibrosis from charges for medical prescriptions. [80620]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* We reviewed exemptions from prescription charges in the Comprehensive Spending Review and concluded that the present arrangements should remain for the rest of this Parliament. We have committed ourselves to no increase in prescription charges above the rate of inflation for the next three years. In every year bar one under the previous Government, prescription charges were increased in real terms—the annual average increase being 12.3 per cent. in real terms.

We continue to demonstrate our commitment to improving the care and quality of life of people with cystic fibrosis through our work with health professionals and all those with relevant interests including the Cystic Fibrosis Trust. This includes provision of Government grant support to the Trust's user involvement project. We have also charged regional offices of the NHS Executive with ensuring that arrangements for commissioning specialised services, such as those for people with cystic fibrosis, are in place. The National Screening Committee is also considering the evidence about antenatal and neonatal screening for cystic fibrosis.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Primary Pupils (Spending)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the money spent per primary age pupil *(a)* from local education authorities, *(b)* from central Government and *(c)* in total (i) in 1996–97, (ii) in 1997–98 and (iii) estimated for 1998–99 for each local education authority ranked in order of total spend. [80102]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information for the years 1996–97 to 1997–98, the latest year for which the figures are available is contained in a number of tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library. Estimated expenditure figures for each authority in 1998–99 are not available, although nationally local authorities' average budgeted expenditure per pupil rose by £167.

European Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee council working documents; [80545]

(2) if he will list the occasions since 1 May 1997 when his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee unofficial texts of draft European legislation. [80552]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The Department receives a large volume of both official and unofficial/working texts during the course of negotiations on EU legislation. In order to facilitate the work of the European Scrutiny Committee and to keep it informed of the progress of negotiations, the Department regularly submits Explanatory Memoranda to the Committee. Ninety-two such memoranda have been submitted since 1 May 1997. The Department has provided the Committee with one unofficial text of draft European legislation, in August 1998, and no Council working document since 1 May 1997.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80418]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treaty of Amsterdam will introduce a chapter on employment which imposes new responsibilities on member states. The employment chapter formalises and builds on the strategy developed by successive European Councils since 1994; its effect on departmental staffing is likely to be unquantifiable. The other bodies principally concerned are the Council and the Commission. The relevant section of the consolidated treaties is Title VIII (ex Title VIa), Articles 125–130.

Single Teacher Classes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils in *(a)* maintained secondary schools and *(b)* maintained primary schools in (i) England and (ii) Wales were in single teacher classes of 40 or more pupils (A) in January 1999 and (B) in each of the six previous years. [80686]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* The available information is shown in the following table.

Information on class sizes in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Numbers of pupils in classes of 41 or more taught by one teacher in maintained primary and secondary schools in England: 1993–99[1]

Position as at January

Year	*Primary schools*	*Secondary schools*
1999	15,223	1,451
1998	17,565	1,630
1997	8,813	470
1996	9,435	816
1995	9,798	1,234
1994	4,697	881
1993	8,918	2,546

[1] Provisional

Chief Inspector of Schools

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. [81554]

Mr. Blunkett: Further to the reply of my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *288*, I have received papers over the period 6 April to 13 April from solicitors acting on behalf of Mrs. Cathy Woodhead. They relate wholly to the progress of the Woodheads' divorce in 1976 and 1977 and date from September 1976. They contain a number of exchanges between Mrs. Woodhead and her solicitor, plus a signed statement from Chris Woodhead admitting to adultery in November and December 1976, some months after he and Amanda Johnston left Gordano school. I have considered that material. No evidence has been presented to me that proves that Mr. Woodhead had a sexual relationship with Ms Johnston while she was his pupil. Both Mr. Woodhead and Ms Johnston have signed documents to the effect that there was no relationship until the late autumn of 1976.

It is not for me as Secretary of State to intervene in the rights and wrongs of a divorce which took place 23 years age; nor to side with either Mr. or Mrs. Woodhead in a dispute about the facts surrounding that divorce. My responsibility is in relation to the role of the Chief Inspector as a Crown employee and to apply good management practice fairly and impartially. There is nothing in the papers I have seen which substantiates the allegations made against Chris Woodhead or calls into question his suitability to continue as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools. I do not, therefore, intend to carry out any further investigations of this matter.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80749]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* "Public Bodies 1998"—copies of which are already available in the Library of the House—provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which my Department is responsible. The majority of public appointments, however, are unpaid as most of those who accept a public appointment do so on a voluntary basis.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Death Penalty (US)

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the US Government concerning the abolition of the death penalty; and if he will make a statement. [80024]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Foreign Office Ministers and officials discuss frequently the abolition of the death penalty with their US counterparts. Baroness Symons most recently raised HMG's opposition to the use of the death penalty in the United States with Harold Koh, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, US State Department, during her visit to Washington in late March.

Her Majesty's Government are opposed to the use of the death penalty in the United States and will continue to use their very close relationship with the US Government to take up death penalty cases whenever appropriate. As EU Presidency in 1998, the UK was instrumental in establishing a set of EU guidelines on death penalty cases, which now form the basis of all EU demarches to the US authorities. To date, the UK has been involved in eight EU demarches. The Foreign Secretary's Death Penalty Panel has also targeted the United States for action, and we are constantly reviewing the best way to tackle the US authorities over the death penalty.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80746]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 15 April 1999]*: "Public Bodies 1998", copies of which are available in the Library of the House, provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which my Department is responsible. The majority of public appointments, however, are unpaid as most of those who accept a public appointment do so on a voluntary basis.

Of the public bodies for which my Department is responsible, the following pay a remuneration to appointees: British Council (£35,000); Commonwealth Institute (£15,000).

Chechnya

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report progress on the department's monitoring of the use to which its advice is put by Granger Telecom in respect of their staff working in Chechnya. [81148]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer to my replies of 21 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *536–37*, and 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *257*. Granger Telecom have informed FCO officials that following Granger's meeting with FCO officials on 21 August 1998, Granger management did not re-consult their field staff about their willingness to work in Chechnya. The advice given by the FCO at the meeting was discussed by Granger Telecom directors. Granger Telecom have reaffirmed that they drew to the attention of their field staff the FCO travel advice for Russia which stated:

"We strongly advise against travel to the Chechen Republic ... because of the unstable security situation. Visitors have been kidnapped in these areas recently."

Granger Telecom have confirmed that they now have no staff working in Chechnya, and that they have no intention of sending staff to Chechnya.

SOCIAL SECURITY

"Modernising Government"

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Government's White Paper, Cm. 4310, "Modernising Government", what are his Department's targets for answering letters, seeing callers without appointments and answering telephone calls; and if he will make a statement. [80895]

Mr. Timms: The current commitments of the Department's Agencies providing a service to the public are:

Answering letters from the public.

Benefits Agency (BA)—to reply within 10 working days of receiving the letter.

Child Support Agency (CSA)—60 per cent. of letters to be answered within 10 working days of receipt.

War Pensions Agency (WPA)—to send an acknowledgement within 5 working days of receipt of the letter. If necessary to make a full response in writing or by phone within 10 working days.

Headquarters—to reply to correspondence from the general public within 20 working days.

Seeing callers without appointments.

BA—receptionist to see callers without appointments within 10 minutes, although this might not be possible in busy periods, the caller should not have to wait more than 30 minutes.

CSA—if the caller has not phoned to arrange an appointment, the Agency aims for a member of CSA staff to see the caller within 10 minutes of the receptionist telling the CSA that the caller has arrived.

WPA—visitors to WPA will be seen within 10 minutes.

Answering telephone calls.

BA—all offices set and publish their own standard for how quickly they answer the phone.

CSA—National Enquiry Line (NEL)—to respond to 80 per cent. of telephone calls within 20 seconds. 80 per cent. of telephone calls to client helplines to be answered first time.

WPA—calls to the Helpline to be answered within 30 seconds. If the question cannot be answered straight away the Agency will call back, at a time convenient to the caller.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Government's White Paper, Cm. 4310, "Modernising Government", what complaints procedure is to be implemented by his Department; how it will be publicised; and if he will make a statement. [80896]

Mr. Timms: Each of the Department's Agencies already has a complaints procedure. Details are set out in their Service First Charters. They are also publicised through a variety of media, such as leaflets, posters, and on the Internet.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the Government's White Paper, Cm. 4310, "Modernising Government", what changes he proposes to make to his Department's services for people with special needs; what methods of consultation he will undertake to assess the effectiveness of the changes; and if he will make a statement. [80897]

Mr. Timms: The "Modernising Government" White Paper makes clear our commitment to provide public services that address the needs of all groups in society. We are committed to improving opportunities and incentives for people who want to work, whilst providing appropriate support to those who cannot.

Those with special needs will have access to the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP), a joint initiative with the Department for Education and Employment to improve opportunities for disabled people who want to move into, or stay in work. In developing the NDDP we have been consulting closely with disabled people and the organisations that represent them. Consultation has taken place at key stages throughout the development of the programme and will continue in the future. As part of the NDDP we are piloting a Personal Adviser service for disabled people in 12 areas covering over 250,000 people receiving an Incapacity Benefit. The service is providing personal support to disabled people who wish to move into, or remain in work. We are also funding 24 Innovative Schemes to test the best ways of helping disabled people into work, of which four specifically cater for people with learning difficulties.

We have arranged for independent evaluation of the initiatives under the NDDP that will include the views of the disabled people who have used them.

In addition to the NDDP, we will be piloting the Single Work Focused Gateway in 12 areas, starting from June 1999. All claimants in the Gateway pilot areas will be allocated their own personal adviser who will help provide appropriate guidance and support for those who want to consider employment, training and rehabilitation.

Through the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill we plan to modernise disability benefits so that they will provide more help for disabled people in greatest need. Certain young disabled people will be entitled to Incapacity Benefit without having to meet the usual contribution conditions; they will gain by up to £26.40 a week. And the higher rate of mobility component of Disability Living Allowance worth £37 a week will be available to severely disabled children aged three and four.

Non-state Administered Pensions

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people earning between £9,000 and £18,500 are currently paying into some form of non-state administered pension provision; and if he will estimate the proportion which *(a)* will remain in this earnings bracket for more than five years and *(b)* will have an income above £18,500 within five years. [81123]

Mr. Timms: Information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Analysis of the 1996 General Household Survey (GHS) and Summer 1998 Labour Force Survey (LFS) suggests that there are around 10.75 million people earning between £9,000 and £20,000. Of these, half are members of an occupational pension scheme, and 2.5 million contribute to a personal pension. Of these 2.5 million, 1 million make no additional contributions above the contracted-out rebate. As the GHS and LFS do not track individuals over a number of years, it is not possible to use these surveys to reliably forecast changes in earnings from year to year.

Estimates made by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)[1] using data from the British Household Panel Survey suggest that of those employees earning between £9,000 and £18,500 at least once between 1992 and 1995, 38 per cent. had earnings within this range in all 4 years, and 26 per cent. earned above £18,500 at least once during this period.

Note:

Partnership in Pensions: An Assessment, IFS commentary 78.

TREASURY

Ethnic Groups

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the ethnic groups present in the United Kingdom and indicate the number of adult (i) males, (ii) females and (iii) children in each such group. [81156]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. William Ross, dated 16 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the ethnic groups present in the United Kingdom.

The latest information available, from the first three quarters of the 1998 Labour Force Survey, is shown for Great Britain in the table.

Estimated numbers of males and females aged 18 and over and the number of children aged under 18, 1998[1], Great Britain

Thousand

Ethnic group	*Adult male*	*Adult female*	*Children under 18*	*Total population*
White	19,986	21,109	11,971	53,066
Black—Caribbean	169	205	134	509
Black—African	121	107	123	351
Black—Other (non-mixed)	53	68	177	298
Indian	354	332	261	948
Pakistani	171	166	219	557
Bangladeshi	60	53	108	222
Chinese	64	74	33	171
Other—Asian (non-mixed)	74	77	50	202
Other—Other	97	108	190	395
All ethnic groups[2]	21,154	22,305	13,272	56,731

[1] Average of the first three quarters

[2] Includes ethnic group not stated

Source:

Labour Force Survey; covers population in private households only

Correspondence

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to reply to the question from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton of 11 March (Ref. 76246). [80894]

Dawn Primarolo: I have done so.

Income Tax (10 Per Cent. Band)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect the introduction of a 10 per cent. income tax band will have on covenanted payments to charities made under existing arrangements by people who, after 5 April, pay a marginal income tax rate of 10 per cent. [80141]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The introduction of the 10 per cent. rate will have no effect on covenanted payments to charities.

Indonesia

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps his Department is taking to encourage the attachment of environmental and social conditions to the provision by official bodies of *(a)* international loans and *(b)* other financial assistance to Indonesia. [77643]

Ms Hewitt: The UK supports the importance attached by the IMF and World Bank to social and environmental issues in the context of its assistance to Indonesia.

A number of the reforms on which Indonesia's IMF programme is conditional relate to policies aimed at mitigating the effect of the financial crisis on the poorest in society. All World Bank projects take account of environmental guidelines, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Overseas assistance is the responsibility of DFID, which is focusing on addressing a number of social and environmental issues in Indonesia.

Taxation

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the amounts, (i) in current prices, (ii) in constant 1998–99 prices and (iii) as percentages of personal income, taken by *(a)* income taxes, *(b)* national insurance contributions, *(c)* value-added tax, *(d)* other central Government indirect taxes, *(e)* the aggregate of *(a)* to (d), (f) average council tax payments and (g) the aggregate of *(a)* to (d) and (f) for (1) a single person, (2) a married couple without children, both working, (3) a married couple with two children, husband in work, wife not working, in each case at 50, 75, 100, 150 and 200 per cent. of average earnings for the financial year 1999–2000, taking account of changes announced in his Budget Statement on 9 March 1999, *Official Report* columns 173–190, and previously announced changes, and for each of the years (x) 1996–97, (y) 1997–98 and (z) 1998–99. [76246]

Dawn Primarolo: The available information, which shows income tax (including child benefit and family credit/working families tax credit) and national insurance contributions, at multiples of median full-time earnings of all employees is given in the table. The figures are shown in *(a)* current prices and *(b)* as percentages of income, for (i) the years 1996–97 to 1998–99 where the figures take account of all changes announced in and before the 1998 Budget, and (ii) for 1999–2000 where the figures taken account of all changes announced in the 1998 and 1999 Budgets which cover 1999–2000 to 2001–02. Estimating the impact of indirect taxes is imprecise as spending patterns vary widely between households with the same composition and income. The level of council tax payments will also vary depending on where families live.

Changes announced in this and the last Budget will offer significant help to families. From October 1999 the WFTC will mean that no family with children will pay net income tax until their earnings exceed £235 per week or more than £12,000 per year. On average families with children will be £740 per year better off.

Percentage of median earnings of all employees

	Applied percentages:				
	50%	*75%*	*100%*	*150%*	*200%*
Single person:					
1996–97					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	153.98	230.97	307.96	461.94	615.92
Income Tax	16.58	35.06	53.53	90.49	135.94
NICs	10.52	18.22	25.92	40.62	40.62
percentage of gross earnings					
Income Tax	10.8	15.2	17.4	19.6	22.1
NICs	6.8	7.9	8.4	8.8	6.6
Tax + NIC	17.6	23.1	25.8	28.4	28.7
1997–98					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	160.37	240.55	320.73	481.10	641.46
Income Tax	16.63	35.07	53.51	90.40	137.78
NICs	11.08	19.09	27.11	41.54	41.54
percentage of gross earnings					
Income Tax	10.4	14.6	16.7	18.8	21.5
NICs	6.9	7.9	8.5	8.6	6.5
Tax + NIC	17.3	22.5	25.1	27.4	28.0
1998–99					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	166.73	250.09	333.46	500.19	66.92
Income Tax	17.31	36.49	55.66	94.01	143.42
NICs	11.55	19.89	28.23	43.38	43.38
percentage of gross earnings					
Income Tax	10.4	14.6	16.7	18.8	21.5
NICs	6.9	8.0	8.5	8.7	6.5
Tax + NIC	17.3	22.5	25.2	27.5	28.0
1999–2000					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	173.56	260.34	347.12	520.69	694.25
Income Tax	16.38	35.47	54.56	92.75	143.97
NICs	9.06	17.73	26.41	43.77	47.20
percentage of gross earnings					
Income Tax	9.4	13.6	15.7	17.8	20.7
NICs	5.2	6.8	7.6	8.4	6.8
Tax + NIC	14.6	20.4	23.3	26.2	27.5
Married with 2 Children:					
1996–97					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	153.98	230.97	307.96	461.94	615.92
Gross Income Tax	11.41	29.89	48.37	85.33	130.78
FC	40.46	4.89	0.00	0.00	0.00
Net Income Tax	−29.05	25.00	48.37	85.33	130.78
NICs	10.52	18.22	25.92	40.62	40.62
CB	19.60	19.60	19.60	19.60	19.60

Percentage of median earnings of all employees

	Applied percentages: 50%	75%	100%	150%	200%
percentage of gross earnings					
Net Income Tax	18.9	10.8	15.7	18.5	21.2
NICs	6.8	7.9	8.4	8.8	6.6
Net IT and NIC—CB	−24.8	10.2	17.8	23.0	24.6
1997–98					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	160.37	240.55	320.73	481.10	641.46
Gross Income Tax	11.35	29.79	48.23	85.12	132.50
FC	39.74	2.14	0.00	0.00	0.00
Net Income Tax	−28.39	27.65	48.23	85.12	132.50
NICs	11.08	19.09	27.11	41.54	41.54
CB	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05	20.05
percentage of gross earnings					
Net Income Tax	−17.7	11.5	15.0	17.7	20.7
NICs	6.9	7.9	8.5	8.6	6.5
Net IT and NIC—CB	−23.3	11.1	17.2	22.2	24.0
1998–99					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	166.73	250.09	333.46	500.19	666.92
Gross Income Tax	11.83	31.01	50.18	88.53	137.94
FC	39.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Net Income Tax	−27.43	31.01	50.18	88.53	137.94
NICs	11.55	19.89	28.23	43.38	43.38
CB	20.75	20.75	20.75	20.75	20.75
percentage of gross earnings					
Net Income Tax	−16.5	12.4	15.0	17.7	20.7
NICs	6.9	8.0	8.5	8.7	6.5
Net IT and NIC—CB	−22.0	12.1	17.3	22.2	24.1
1999–2000					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	173.56	260.34	347.12	520.69	694.25
Gross Income Tax	8.69	27.78	46.87	85.06	141.11
WFTC	68.95	36.50	4.04	0.00	0.00
Net Income Tax	−60.26	−8.72	42.83	85.06	141.11
NICs	9.06	17.73	26.41	43.77	47.20
CB	24.70	24.70	24.70	24.70	24.70
percentage of gross earnings					
Net Income Tax	−34.7	−3.3	12.3	16.3	20.3
NICs	5.2	6.8	7.6	8.4	6.8
Net IT and NIC—CB	−43.7	−6.0	12.8	20.0	23.6
Married 2 Earners (0 Children):					
1996–97					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	153.98	230.97	307.96	461.94	615.92
Income Tax	0.00	12.07	28.96	64.95	101.90
NICs	5.64	13.34	21.04	36.43	51.83
percentage of gross earnings					
Income Tax	0.0	5.2	9.4	14.1	16.5
NICs	3.7	5.8	6.8	7.9	8.4
Tax + NIC	3.7	11.0	16.2	21.9	25.0
1997–98					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	160.37	240.55	320.73	481.10	641.46
Income Tax	0.00	11.72	28.83	64.86	101.74
NICs	6.12	14.13	22.15	38.19	54.23
percentage of gross earnings					
Income Tax	0.0	4.9	9.0	13.5	15.9
NICs	3.8	5.9	6.9	7.9	8.5
Tax + NIC	3.8	10.7	15.9	21.4	24.3

Percentage of median earnings of all employees

	Applied percentages: 50%	75%	100%	150%	200%
1998–99					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	166.73	250.09	333.46	500.19	666.92
Income Tax	0.00	12.27	30.04	67.49	105.84
NICs	6.43	14.77	23.11	39.78	56.45
percentage of gross earnings					
Income Tax	0.0	4.9	9.0	13.5	15.9
NICs	3.9	5.9	6.9	8.0	8.5
Tax + NIC	3.9	10.8	15.9	21.4	24.3
1999–2000					
£ per week, current prices					
Gross Income	173.56	260.34	347.12	520.69	694.25
Income Tax	2.08	14.64	32.76	70.95	109.13
NICs	2.11	9.43	18.11	35.47	52.83
percentage of gross earnings					
Income Tax	1.2	5.6	9.4	13.6	15.7
NICs	1.2	3.6	5.2	6.8	7.6
Tax + NIC	2.4	9.2	14.6	20.4	23.3

Notes:

1. Income tax payments are calculated on the basis that the households receive no tax reliefs other than the standard allowances and only have income from employment. All earners, including wives, are assumed to pay Class 1 national insurance contributions at the contracted-in rate.

2. Earnings are taken to be the median gross weekly earnings of all full-time employees on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. (Median earnings are more representative of the population as a whole than mean male full-time earnings.)

3. A family with 2 children is assumed to have both children aged under 11.

4. In line with the convention in the Tax Benefit Reference Manual, child benefit is treated as negative income tax.

5. Family Credit, although not part of the tax system, has been treated in the same way as WFTC so as to provide comparability with the tax system following the introduction of WFTC.

6. The calculations assume earnings growth for 1998–99 onwards of an illustrative 4 per cent.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

IACS Maps

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many officials are involved in IACS map checks; how many map checks have been carried out; and what was the financial saving as a result of the mistakes found. [73293]

Mr. Rooker: Under the programme carried out by the Department between 1994–1998, IACS map checks were undertaken in respect of 2,174,843 field areas and numbers to establish the accuracy of the details included in Area Aid Applications and entered on the IACS database. The number of officials involved in the programme and the total value of reductions to claims were not recorded centrally and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the object of the programme was to protect Community expenditure on the schemes governed by IACS not only for the period up to 1998 but also, by verifying the information recorded on the IACS database, which is used to validate claims in subsequent years.

CAP

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish for each year between 1992 and 1999 what his Department assessed to be the world prices for the agricultural outputs, products and animals, which are the subject of its Common Agricultural Policy. [79777]

Mr. Rooker: Agricultural commodities can have a range of traded values on world markets depending on product quality, specification and seasonality. Our Department uses a number of sources of published information in order to assess this range. Sources include publications by the OECD, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and specialist agricultural reports such as those provided by Agra Europe. World prices for agricultural outputs, products and animals for 1999 are not yet available.

Copies of the OECD and WTO reports are available in the Library of the House. The World Bank and Agra Europe reports are available direct from those organisations.

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80525]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *239–40*. MAFF will be participating fully in all central initiatives to address race equality issues in the Civil Service, and will be actively addressing these issues within the Department.

Farmers (Land Management)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what ways his Department plans to provide support for farmers in managing land so as to increase biodiversity. [79905]

Mr. Morley: The Government are fully committed to increasing biodiversity. MAFF operates a wide ranging package of voluntary environmental schemes aimed at encouraging farmers to conserve the countryside and its wildlife and thereby contribute to meeting the objectives of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Following the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, we have announced that we aim to expand the area protected and enhanced under the major agri-environment schemes. During the next three years an additional £40 million will be available in England for additional agreements under these schemes.

MAFF also funds free initial on-farm conservation advice which is provided to farmers by ADAS and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG).

Rendering Plants

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action the Government are taking to facilitate the establishment of porcine-only rendering plants. [80243]

Mr. Rooker: Representations have been made by the pig industry and the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) to allow porcine MBM to be fed to poultry on the condition that processing takes place in rendering plants dedicated to pig waste. The existing ban was put in place on the recommendation of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, and the Government continue to base their handling of BSE on the advice of that Committee.

Before we would be prepared to ask SEAC to look at the use of porcine MBM for export or poultry feed purposes the industry itself will need to address the key issues of how monitoring at all stages of production and distribution would be carried out to avoid the possibility of cross-contamination.

Rendering

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantity of United Kingdom pig, poultry and beef waste is exported from the United Kingdom for rendering in other countries. [80487]

Mr. Rooker: In 1998 UK exports of poultry and non-bovine mammalian waste was 62,600 tonnes (provisional figure). The Overseas Trade Statistics do not further specify the derivation of this waste or the purpose for which it is exported. Since 27 March 1996 the export of products from bovine animals has been banned.

Genetically Modified Oil Seed Rape

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the earliest possible date is for commercial planting in the UK of genetically modified oil seed rape. [80554]

Mr. Rooker: There will be no commercial planting of genetically modified oilseed rape in the UK before 2000.

Krebs Report

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much has been spent on the *(a)* preparation and *(b)* implementation of the Krebs report to date. [79866]

Mr. Rooker: *(a)* The cost of preparing the Krebs report, including the committee expenditure and publication, amounted to approximately £370,000.

(b) The cost of implementation to date is £3.5 million. This includes the culling trial and associated activities. The cost of some recommendations, such as the open competition necessary to ensure that research should be contracted with the people who are best able to carry them out, are met from central expenditure and cannot be separately identified.

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the cost of fully implementing the Krebs report. [79867]

Mr. Rooker: We have spent more than £3.5 million on implementing the Krebs report to date. It is estimated that £11.4 million will be spent on research and various projects recommended in the Krebs report in 1999/2000. I envisage that expenditure will continue at broadly this level for some years, but cannot provide a total figure, which will depend on the results and the speed at which those results are received and analysed.

Bonemeal

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the *(a)* medical and *(b)* public health implications of feeding livestock with bonemeal from UK-produced pig and poultry. [80485]

Mr. Rooker: Mammalian meat and bonemeal (MBM) is considered to have been the main source of infection in the BSE epidemic. Controls on the use of mammalian MBM have been progressively tightened in the light of experience and the latest available advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC), the Government's independent advisor on BSE issues. The controls in place are: a prohibition on all mammalian protein, including MBM, in ruminant feed; and a prohibition on the feeding of mammalian MBM to all farmed livestock to prevent cross-contamination of ruminant rations. This ban was not introduced to protect the health of pigs and poultry. The existing bans on the use of mammalian MBM in feed for farmed animals do not extend to MBM derived from poultry.

SEAC provided advice to the Government on the practice of intraspecies recycling of waste in the pig and poultry industries in December 1997. They considered that there may be a very small risk of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) arising spontaneously within a species and recommended that a strategy be developed to remove the small potential risk of TSE transmission from the recycling of pig and poultry waste as feed for the same species. The Government have accepted this advice.

Copies of all SEAC advice are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80420]

Mr. Rooker: The Treaty of Amsterdam will have minimal impact on the responsibilities of the Department and its staffing. As far as EU bodies are concerned, there will be an increased role for the European Parliament, following the amendment to Article 129 of the Treaty to extend the co-decision procedure to cover measures in the veterinary and phytosanitary fields which have as their direct objective the protection of public health.

Pig Farmers

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what analysis he has made of support from the Government of the USA for pig farmers in that country; and if he will make a statement on the implications of that support for United Kingdom producers. [80246]

Mr. Rooker: Late last year the USA Government introduced a variety of aid measures for small pig farmers. Although the USA is the EU's main competitor in world pigmeat markets, the impact of these aid measures on UK producers is likely to be indirect and relatively small.

Pig Products

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage caterers in the public sector to source British pig products. [80245]

Mr. Rooker: Ministers in MAFF have spearheaded a campaign that seeks to improve communication and understanding between the domestic pigmeat industry and the catering and food service sector, including companies involved in public sector catering. The ultimate objective of this campaign is to increase the usage of pigmeat products in the catering sector by stressing the quality and welfare benefits of British pigmeat, thereby improving market opportunities for UK pig producers.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce measures to ensure that the costs of the Food Standards Agency are not imposed upon farmers. [79879]

Mr. Rooker: Our detailed proposals for a levy scheme to fund the new costs of the Food Standards Agency, recently the subject of extensive public consultation, do not propose that the levy be applied to farms. However, farm shops required to register under the Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991 would be required to pay the proposed levy.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* others on the issue of genetically modified food; and what proportion of these representations called for a restriction on the development or sale of genetically modified products. [80211]

Mr. Rooker: Since the beginning of 1998, Ministers in this Department have received 1,100 letters from hon. Members about GM foods and biotechnology in general, and approximately 5,500 letters from members of the public and others. Although many of these expressed concerns about the technology of one sort or another, it is not possible to determine the exact proportion which called for a restriction to be placed on the development or sale of GM products without incurring disproportionate costs.

Honey

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from UK honey suppliers regarding potential contamination of honey by genetically modified material, with particular reference to *(a)* DNA and *(b)* proteins; and if he will make a statement. [80555]

Mr. Rooker: I have received occasional representations from beekeepers seeking advice on the implications of bees foraging GM crops. The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes hosted a workshop in 1991 to consider the safety of pollen from GM plants in honey. The workshop's conclusion was that the consumption of gene products from pollen in honey was likely to be negligible. The results from three research projects commissioned by MAFF to investigate this further subsequently confirmed this conclusion.

Internal Drainage Boards

Mr. Brake: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will *(a)* list the members of internal drainage boards in England and Wales and *(b)* publish the register of interests for these members. [81052]

Mr. Morley: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 19 April 1999

SCOTLAND

New Opportunities Fund

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to reply to the letter from the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland of 5 February regarding the operation of the New Opportunities Fund in Scotland. [80933]

Mr. Dewar: A reply will be sent very shortly.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Attorney-General what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80526]

The Attorney-General: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *239–40*.

Glidewell Report

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Attorney-General what decisions he has taken on the recommendations on file preparation, case management and witness warning in the report of the Review of the Crown Prosecution Service by the right hon. Sir Iain Glidewell. [81491]

The Attorney-General: The interim response to the Report by Sir Iain Glidewell which I published on 30 November 1998 drew attention to the fact that these key recommendations (recommendations 13–16, 20 and 31) were being considered by a newly formed Criminal Justice Units Project Group, chaired jointly by the CPS and the Association of Police Officers. The Project Group, which also included representatives from other agencies and an independent member, has now completed its consideration of the Report's recommendations, and has made proposals for taking them forward.

The Project Group has proposed that there should be a national model for joint administration, which incorporates the principles of flexibility and partnership and which builds on the arrangements currently being piloted to reduce delays under the Narey Reducing Delays initiative. It is important, as the Report recognises, that the new arrangements provide flexibility, so that Chief Crown Prosecutors and Chief Constables can develop local solutions jointly.

The Government have decided to accept this proposal. This partnership approach between the CPS and the police, reflecting the principles advocated by Glidewell and incorporating elements of co-location, common administration and integrated working, will provide the framework for better working relationships between CPS staff and operational police officers and ensure that the work of both agencies is more effective. It will further streamline casework and file handling processes, remove duplication and unnecessary burdens, and reduce delay.

The new model for joint administration will also enable the police and the CPS to provide a better service to victims and witnesses, building on established arrangements and maintaining the co-ordination of victim and witness care.

A feature of the new arrangements is that the police will retain their responsibility for file preparation and witness warning, and that accordingly these responsibilities should not be transferred to the CPS as recommended by Glidewell. The Government have decided that it would not be practical, or a proper reflection of the respective constitutional priorities of the CPS and the police, to require a transfer of responsibilities. The new arrangements will, however, ensure closer co-operation between the police and the CPS and improved file preparation.

Chief Crown Prosecutors and Chief Constables will be asked to submit joint outline implementation plans by the end of November 1999 to a new inter-agency implementation group which we are setting up to oversee these new arrangements.

DEFENCE

Civil Servants (Appraisal)

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the appraisal performance markings awarded to civil servants in 1998 for *(a)* each agency in his Department and *(b)* the Department broken down by (i) grade, (ii) gender, (iii) ethnicity, (iv) part-time/full-time working and (v) disability; and for (1) each agency and (2) the Department whether the Cabinet Office's four fifths rule for detecting potential adverse impact was applied to the appraisal markings of civil servants in the 1998 report round. [78147]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Weather Stations

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the height above sea level of the weather stations at *(a)* Ashover, Derbyshire, *(b)* Buxton, Derbyshire, *(c)* Slaidburn, Lancashire, *(d)* Emley Moor, West Yorkshire and *(e)* Sheffield Dore; and what is the average height above sea level for the Oldham, East and Saddleworth constituency. [80278]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Ann Tourle to Mr. Phil Woolas, dated 19 April 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the height above sea level of various weather stations. This matter falls within the area of responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Met. Office. As the Chief Executive is on holiday at the moment, I am replying on his behalf.

The information you requested is given in the table.

Weather station	Height above sea level (metres)[1]
Ashover	178
Buxton	307
Slaidburn[2]	192
Emley Moor	259
Sheffield Dore[3]	206

[1] All heights refer to height above sea level of station rain gauge

[2] Station closed on 30 June 1996

[3] Station closed on 31 January 1985

I took advice from the Military Survey Agency on the average height above sea level for the Oldham East and Saddleworth constituency. Based on the mean of the highest and lowest points in the area, which are at Blindstones (541 metres) and Wellihole Bridge (148 metres) respectively, this is 344.5 metres.

Project Horizon

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on developments in Project Horizon. [81044]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence plans to meet his French and Italian colleagues shortly to discuss the way forward for the Horizon programme.

KPMG

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* consultancy and *(b)* other contracts his Department has had with KPMG since 1 May 1997; and if KPMG is a prospective candidate for future contracts his Department is intending to let. [81419]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *31–32*. I can confirm that the company are prospective candidates for future contracts.

Territorial Army

Mr. Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes there have been to the plans for Territorial Army units and their locations contained in the Government publication, "Modern Forces for the Modern World: A Territorial Army for the Future". [81493]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Since the announcement on the structure of the Territorial Army on 17 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns 749–71, there have been a number of small refinements to the detailed plan. These involve some location changes and some changes in the timing of moves, and these are shown in the table. In addition, this opportunity is being taken to correct several typographical errors in the document and these too are shown in the tables.

Location changes

TA centre	Announced occupants	Revised plan
Middlesborough—(Stockton Road TA Centre)	Was to be base to full infantry company plus pioneer detachment	1. Stockton Road retains infantry company less a platoon detachment which will instead be based at Coulby Newham TA Centre 2. Pioneer detachment to be based at Cramlington TA Centre
Scarborough	Was to be base to full infantry company	Scarborough retains infantry company less a platoon detachment, to be based at Northallerton TA Centre (which was to have remained open only for cadets).
Telford	Telford to retain two TA Centres (one with ammunition squadron, the other with yeomanry headquarters squadron and surgical squadron)	Surgical squadron to go to Copthorne Barracks, Shrewsbury (to co-locate with infantry company). Telford still retains two TA Centres.
Newcastle	Debdon Gardens was to be base to whole of 219 Field Squadron	A detachment of 219 Squadron to be based at Sunderland TA Centre. Debdon Gardens remains open for other units.

Changed timings/rolls

Unit	Announced plan	Proposed plan
Headquarters Squadron 21 Signal Regiment (a TA sub unit in a regular regiment)	Due to move from Trowbridge to Oxford to become part of new radio support regiment	Move from Trowbridge as planned but to be housed temporarily at Bath before moving to Oxford, upon formation of radio support regiment which is delayed.
43 Squardron 21 Signal Regiment (a TA sub unit in a regular regiment)	Due to move from Bridgewater to Bath to become part of new radio support regiment	Move to Bath as planned but retain current 21 Signal Regiment air support role until later re-roled to radio support regiment
Royal Yeomanry Squadron, Slough	Due to disband 1 July 1999	Retain until 1 June 2000
Royal Wessex Yeomanry Headquarters Squadron Cirencester	Was to assume Nuclear Biological and Chemical role	Assume armoured role. The second Nuclear Biological and Chemical squadron now to be Royal Yeomanary Headquarters Squadron in London.

Typographic errors

Unit	*Printed text*	*Corrected text*
105 Regiment Royal Artillery (Volunteers) Light Aid Detachment	Co-locate with 207 Battery in Glasgow	Remain with Regimental Headquarters in Edinburgh
Infantry Detachment Castleford	Announced incorrectly as a band	
Lowland Battalion	Company Headquarters in Dumfries; Infantry detachment in Galashiels	Company Headquarters in Galashiels; Infantry detachment in Dumfries
256 Field Hospital	Headquarters in Hammersmith Road; Squadron in Braganza Street	Headquarters in Braganza Street; Squadron in Hammersmith Road
Aldershot for Cadet Unit Training	Seeley House, Shoe Lane, Aldershot	Seely House, Shoe Lane, Aldershot

Kosovo

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the integration of the frigate Somerset into a French-led naval group off Kosovo, with particular reference to the role of (i) the WEU, (ii) NATO and (iii) the St. Malo Accords in the formulation of this policy. [81045]

Mr. George Robertson: HMS Somerset has been attached to the French Task Group, led by the French aircraft carrier FOCH, since 14 February and is scheduled to revert to national tasking shortly. The integration of Somerset was at the invitation of the French authorities immediately following the St. Malo Summit. Initially scheduled as a training mission to the Indian Ocean, the Task Group was diverted for operations in the Adriatic following the deterioration of the situation in Kosovo. The integration is purely a bilateral arrangement between the UK and France and has no particular reference to WEU or NATO.

The concept of a combined deployment is very much in the spirit of closer military co-operation between the UK and France, reinforced by the signing of the Letter of Intent at the St. Malo Summit in December 1998. It also takes forward the navy-to-navy Letter of Intent signed in 1996, which tasked our two navies

"to continue to investigate the possibilities for the attachment of units for extended periods".

The integration is an excellent means to further strengthen our bilateral links and provides a practical dimension to the present debate on European security and defence.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the refugee camps built by British forces in Albania and the former Yugoslavia as a result of the current Kosovo crisis; and if he will make a statement. [80925]

Mr. George Robertson: British Forces have assisted in the construction of the Bojane camp 15 km west of the Macedonian capital Skopje and the refugee handling centre 10 km north of Skopje consisting of the Brazde, Stenkovac and Eurotrade sites.

Service Personnel (Incapacity Benefit)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the eligibility for higher rate incapacity benefit of service personnel who are on sick leave when discharged. [80698]

Mr. Bayley: I have been asked to reply.

No such representations have been received.

On discharge from the forces, former service personnel who are sick or disabled can claim Incapacity Benefit. The short-term higher rate of Incapacity Benefit is payable after 28 weeks and the long-term rate after 52 weeks.

Periods of sickness before discharge do not count towards the qualifying periods for the higher rates of Incapacity Benefit. Rules do, however, protect potential entitlement to the age addition payable with long-term Incapacity Benefit. For former members of the forces, it is the earliest date that the person became sick that is relevant in deciding entitlement to the age addition.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Football

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what requirements *(a)* exist and *(b)* he plans to introduce for staff who work with junior footballers to have qualifications in (i) first aid and (ii) vocational training. [79911]

Mr. Banks: The football authorities are responsible for the development of football in this country. The Football Association has developed coaching courses for coaches, teachers and those connected with junior football teams. These courses include in their curricula teaching and coaching techniques and principles of play, together with first aid training. The FA lays down specific requirements for those working in Centres of Excellence and Football Academies to hold the relevant qualifications. As part of the 'Charter for Quality', the FA will be introducing at the end of 1999 a national, voluntary, kite-mark scheme of 'Chartermark' clubs to recognise clubs in junior football that meet specific conditions, including the requirement that junior managers and coaches hold FA approved first aid and coaching qualifications.

PRIME MINISTER

Social Chapter (Civil Servants)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those elements of the Social Chapter which have been covered by letters sent out by Government Departments inviting civil servants to waive their rights under them. [80449]

The Prime Minister: There are no Social Chapter measures for which Government Departments have invited civil servants to waive their rights.

European Commission President

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions the Government are having with the President-nominate of the European Commission on use of his veto in the selection of fellow commissioners. [81039]

The Prime Minister: The Amsterdam Treaty states that the nominee for President shall work with Member States to nominate other Commissioners by common accord. The Government will be happy to work with Mr. Prodi in the selection of UK nominees.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister what measures the Government are planning to mark final ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam. [81040]

The Prime Minister: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will issue a press release before the Amsterdam treaty enters into force on 1 May, outlining some of the key new elements. Other Government Departments may issue press releases highlighting areas where the Amsterdam Treaty will affect their departmental business.

Euro Task Forces

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those UK-appointed members of euro task forces whose views on UK participation in the single currency are known to the Government. [81047]

The Prime Minister: In October 1997 my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set up a Business Advisory Group (BAG), headed by Lord Simon, to advise on the practical issues associated with UK membership. Representative organisations were invited to send their own nominated members. Subsequently, working groups were set up to look at sectoral preparations. In total over 100 individuals and representative organisations were consulted in producing the outline national changeover plan.

BAG members were chosen as representatives of their organisations, not because of any particular view they hold on participation in the single currency. The organisations represented on the BAG are the Institute of Directors, Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, Council for Travel and Tourism, British Bankers' Association, Association of Payment Clearing Services, British Retail Consortium, Confederation of British Industry, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting, Trades Union Congress, Consumers' Association, British Chamber of Commerce, Association of Corporate Treasurers, Computer Services and Software Association, Bank of England, Association of British Insurers, Building Societies Association, Forum of Private Business, Federation of Small Businesses, Law Society, Engineering Employers' Federation, Hundred Group of Finance Directors.

Single Currency

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns 2–3, for what reasons the determining factor on any Government decision underpinning membership of a single currency is whether the economic case for the United Kingdom joining is clear and unambiguous rather than the constitutional and political implications of that decision. [81147]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to my statement in the House on 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 179, where I said:

> "I do not dismiss the constitutional or political issues . . . If joining a single currency is good for British jobs and British industry, if it enhances British influence and power, I believe it is right for Britain to overcome these constitutional and political arguments and fears behind them. For the very reason of the sensitivity of those arguments, we have said very clearly that the Government can recommend, but the people will decide in a referendum."

Macedonia

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister what measures he is taking to extend the mandate of the UN Preventive Deployment Force in Macedonia; and what assessment he has made of the effect on efforts to achieve this on the number of UK troops in the region. [81248]

The Prime Minister: The Mandate of the UN Preventative Force (UNPREDEP) expired on 28 February 1999 because there was no consensus within the UN Security Council to renew its mandate. Its role was entirely separate from that of the NATO forces in Macedonia. As there was no UK contingent in UNPPREDEP, its demise has had no effect on the build-up of UK forces in Macedonia.

Correspondence

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to reply to *(a)* the letter from the hon. Member for North Essex concerning Reeves Transport Services Ltd and *(b)* the letters he has received from Reeves Transport Services Ltd. [81360]

The Prime Minister: I have replied to the hon. Member today. Similarly, my office has replied direct to Reeves Transport Ltd. today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sierra Leone

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if discussions on possible questions were held between a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and *(a)* himself, *(b)* his other departmental Ministers, *(c)* his departmental parliamentary private secretaries, *(d)* his civil servants or *(e)* his departmental special advisers prior to his evidence sessions with the Committee in the course of its Sierra Leone inquiry. [76083]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 11 March 1999]*: No.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the total number

of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76829]

Mr. Robin Cook: Between 2 May 1997 and 28 February 1999, my special advisers have made visits overseas on 28 occasions in an official capacity. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

EC Budget

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if budget line A-3021 of the European Communities budget is open to organisations which advance the idea of a non-federal Europe. [80159]

Ms Quin: The *Official Journal of the European Communities* describes Budget line A-3021 as providing grants to organisations advancing the idea of Europe, in particular those working actively for European integration. There is no reference to the promotion of federalism in Europe.

Séminaire Franco-Britannique

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the speeches delivered at the Séminaire Franco-Britannique sur l'Euro by representatives of the British Government. [80158]

Ms Quin: We are arranging to have copies placed in the Libraries of the House.

St. Malo Accord

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in Franco-British co-operation since the signing of the St. Malo Accord. [80148]

Ms Quin: The St. Malo Summit identified a broad variety of areas for enhanced Franco-British co-operation: European defence, crisis management, common foreign and security policy, Africa, EU institutions, integrated transport issues, duty free, the entrepreneurship taskforce, the millennium bug, the Franco-British electronic village, dialogue 2000, Paris-London 2000, the audio-visual working group, and this year's British-French summit. The pace of progress will differ from subject to subject, but the summit gave considerable impetus to a closer relationship, and work is ongoing in these and other areas to ensure that there is the closest bilateral engagement.

In some aspects this has already yielded concrete progress—for example, the proposed joint Foreign Ministers' visit and Heads of Mission Conference in Africa took place in February and proved the effectiveness of such shared contacts on African issues. There have been very productive bilateral meetings between Ministers, including myself and M. Moscovici, my French counterpart, on 14 January, as well as between senior officials, and more are planned for the near future, for example, meetings between the Ministers of Tourism.

Falklands

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Chile about the prospective removal of the Lan Chile air link to the Falklands. [80216]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We expressed our regret to the Chilean Government over their decision last December to ask Chilean carriers not to fly to the Falklands and said that we did not believe this to be justified. When we became aware recently that the Chilean Government were considering publishing a decree prohibiting Chilean carriers from flying to the Falklands, we told them that we would strongly regret such a measure. We are very disappointed that they have nevertheless published such a decree. Lan Chile have not been able to fly to the Islands since their contract with the Falkland Islands Development Corporation expired on 31 March. While we hope that they will be allowed to resume the flights, other options are under consideration. We are in close touch with the Falkland Islands Government on this.

Maastricht Treaty

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list decision-making powers which have been restored to the United Kingdom from EU institutions since the Maastricht Treaty came into effect. [80234]

Ms Quin: The issue of repatriation of powers from the EU to Member States was not on the agenda for either the Maastricht or Amsterdam IGCs.

The Maastricht Treaty, however, introduced the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality into EC law, both of which were given further effect by the Protocol agreed at Amsterdam. The principle of subsidiarity aims to ensure that decisions are taken at the most appropriate level in areas of shared competence between the EC and Member States. Its application is one way of ensuring that decisions are taken as close to the citizen as possible.

Written Answers

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for how many written parliamentary questions he has referred the interrogator to a previous answer since 1 May 1997; and if he will break this down by subject area. [80451]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested is not kept centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate diversion of staff time.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80416]

Ms Quin: I do not expect implementation of the Treaty of Amsterdam to add significantly to my Department's responsibilities.

Peru

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the President of Peru on the release of prisoners found innocent by the Ad Hoc Commission. [80080]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have made no representations personally to President Fujimori. However, during my visit to Peru in January, I discussed the issue with both the Technical Adviser to the Ad Hoc Commission, Dr. Gina Costa, and the Human Rights Ombudsman, Jorge Santistevan. During 1998, the Commission continued to recommend presidential pardons for applicants, and won the release of an additional 102 detainees, bringing the total of those pardoned to 462.

The British Embassy in Lima has raised this issue with the Ad Hoc Commission. We also intend to discuss this, and other human rights issues, with the Peruvian delegation in Geneva, in the margins of the Commission on Human Rights (22 March-30 April).

Arms Brokering

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions took place on the issue of brokering in the meeting of the Council of Ministers COARM working group on 18 March; and what position was taken by the United Kingdom representative. [81103]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* There was no substantive discussion of the issue of controls on arms trafficking and brokering at COARM on 18 March.

We have already told EU partners that the UK welcomes the initiative taken by the German Presidency to discuss within the EU the question of uniform national controls on arms trafficking and brokering, and intends to participate constructively in the debate. We have also drawn the attention of EU partners to the proposals for national controls on trafficking and brokering as set out in the White Paper on Strategic Export Controls presented to Parliament by the President of the Board of Trade in July 1998 (Cm 3989), which differ in a number of respects from the initial Presidency proposals.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment he has made of the implications for the Commissioners of the Macpherson inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80536]

Mr. Stuart Bell: Ensuring equal opportunity and the demonstration of fairness in all aspects of conduct within the Commissioners' office is something the Commissioners and indeed all the other central Church institutions take extremely seriously.

The Commissioners have followed equal opportunity practice in their recruitment and promotion procedures for many years and equal opportunities training for those operating these areas has been provided. Human resources departments across the national Church institutions were merged in 1998 in anticipation of the creation of the Archbishops' Council from January 1999. Equal opportunities awareness training has been offered to all of the central Church institutions' staff and this year we introduced a new Equal Opportunities Policy.

The Policy states our belief that we benefit from a workforce drawn from a wide cross-section of the community and confirms our commitment to developing and supporting all staff. Particularly relevant to the question is the definition of and procedure for dealing with racial harassment; recruitment and selection procedures including advertisement in publications with a predominantly ethnic readership where those groups are under-represented in our workforce; and training in equal opportunity awareness.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80520]

Mr. Meale: I refer to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave my hon. Friend on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *239–40*.

In addition, the British Transport Police Service is currently studying Sir William Macpherson's report. It will be implementing any appropriate recommendations in a process of consultation with the rest of the police service. A team headed by Chief Officers has already been appointed to identify areas from the report that can be taken forward.

Vehicle Registration

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of vehicles below 1100cc were first registered before 1992. [79929]

Ms Glenda Jackson: At the end of September 1998—the latest date for which information is available—72 per cent. of vehicles licensed in the Private and Light Goods class at or below 1100cc were first registered before 1992.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to increase the fixed penalty levied on vehicles which fail to pass MOT emissions standards; [81050]

(2) what progress he has made on the implementation of roadside vehicle testing schemes; [81049]

(3) what plans he has to allow *(a)* environmental health officers and *(b)* traffic wardens to undertake roadside emission testing without a police officer present. [81051]

Dr. Reid: The trial scheme involving seven local authorities in roadside emissions testing has been running for just over a year. I am currently evaluating the results of their work and hope to make an announcement in due course about whether the scheme might continue.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the average level of emissions per mile from cars of *(a)* under 1100 cc, *(b)* 1101–1500 cc, *(c)* 1501–2000 cc, *(d)* 2001–3000 cc and *(e)* over 3000 cc. [81257]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department does not calculate the average emissions per mile for cars by engine size. Emissions of local air pollutants from all cars, regardless of their engine size, are regulated by the same mandatory emission standards.

But cars with larger engine sizes tend to consume more fuel and emit more CO_2 emissions, although emissions from different models with the same engine size can vary considerably, depending on fuel type, engine technology and vehicle weight. To illustrate this trend, the following table provides estimates by engine size of the average CO_2 emissions per kilometre from all new petrol cars sold in 1997, based on official fuel consumption tests using a combined driving cycle.

Engine size	*Average CO_2 emissions (g/km)*
up to 1100cc	139
1101–1500cc	160
1501–2000cc	193
2001–3000cc	241
over 3000cc	301

Air Quality

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice he has issued to local authorities on the use of equipment to monitor compliance with national air quality objectives for particles. [80783]

Mr. Meale: Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 requires every local authority periodically to review air quality in its area. The Air Quality Regulations 1997 prescribe air quality objectives for seven pollutants, including particles (PM_{10}), to be achieved by 2005. Local authorities have to consider the present quality of air and the likely future quality of air, and assess whether prescribed objectives are likely to be achieved by the end of 2005. To assist local authorities the Secretary of State has issued a series of guidance under section 88(1) of the Environment Act 1995. One of these guidance notes, "Monitoring for air quality reviews and assessments" LAQM.TG1(98), includes guidance on monitoring particles.

The Government recently published their proposals for review of the National Air Quality Strategy (NAQS), and, in particular, their proposals for revised and additional objectives for the pollutants. During the review process, as a result of the better understanding of the sources and types of particles in the UK provided by the work of the Airborne Particles Expert Group, it became apparent that the current PM_{10} objective would not be achievable in a number of local authority areas with any measures that are currently practicable. The Group's work also revealed the importance of non-UK sources and the limit to which local authority action could control levels of PM_{10}. The Government are therefore consulting on a proposal to replace the objective with the Stage 1 limit values in the EC Air Quality Daughter Directive, while retaining it as an indicative level. Discussions are also in progress with the UK's EC partners to explore ways of reducing the transboundary particle problem.

Should the Government decide to proceed with their proposal, such a change would have significant implications for the scale of work local authorities would need to undertake on the review and assessment of PM_{10} and the conclusions they reach. To help local authorities, and without prejudice to the outcome of the consultation process, my officials have written to local authorities with further information on how they might proceed with the review and assessment process ahead of a decision on the Strategy review.

Copies of the Secretary of State's guidance note and the further information provided by officials, both mentioned above, have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Ruddy Ducks

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice he has received from (i) English Nature and (ii) other agencies regarding the cull of the Ruddy Duck; what advice he has received as to the cost of the cull; if he has put the contract for the cull out to tender; and what plans he has to take powers of compulsory access to enforce the cull. [80796]

Mr. Meacher: In July 1998, I set up a Task Force to advise on the action required in the United Kingdom to conserve the globally threatened white-headed duck. This Task Force included representation from English Nature, other conservation agencies and non-Governmental organisations. In January this year I accepted the recommendations of the Task Force that a control trial should be undertaken to test the feasibility of eradicating the UK's population of ruddy duck.

The cost of the control trial is approximately £800,000 over 4 financial years. The Central Science Laboratory has been contracted to undertake the work. An assessment of whether or not compulsory access would be required to ensure success in any future eradication programme is a key objective of the control trial.

Council Tax

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the criteria which will be used to determine for capping purposes whether council tax rises are unjustifiable. [80788]

Ms Armstrong: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *50–51*, that most local authorities have set sensible budgets this year and that we will not be capping any councils.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what

steps his Department has taken to implement the recommendation of the Bates report on the PFI that it should conduct an urgent review into planning procedures. [81122]

Mr. Raynsford: In the light of the conclusions of the Bates report in June 1997, the Department discussed with the Treasury Taskforce and other Departments, the instances that had led to the Report's recommendation. The conclusion reached was that review of the planning system was not required but that my Department would work with other Departments sponsoring PFI projects as necessary to seek to resolve any difficulties that might arise in respect of the planning process. We will keep under review the need for guidance to clarify how PFI schemes can be taken forward efficiently within the existing planning system.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the Channel Tunnel Rail Link to be completed in its entirety; and if he will make a statement. [81352]

Dr. Reid: I understand from London & Continental Railways, the company contracted to build the whole of the Rail Link under the terms of the CTRL Development Agreement, that the first section (from the Channel Tunnel to Fawkham Junction near Gravesend) should be completed in 2003. They expect the second section (from Fawkham Junction to St. Pancras) to be completed in 2007.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the qualitative difference in terms of impact on the environment between the growing of genetically modified crops *(a)* in farm-scale field trials and *(b)* on a commercial basis. [81268]

Mr. Meacher: There should be no difference apart from one of scale. The genetically modified crops in the farm-scale evaluations will be grown under normal commercial conditions following the suppliers' recommendations and requirements for the use of seed and herbicide.

Rural Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in respect of the £50 million allocated in the 1998 Budget for rural bus services, how much has been spent, how much has been allocated but not yet spent, and how many extra bus journeys have run as a consequence of this extra money. [81264]

Dr. Reid: Of the £50 million a year for rural transport in the United Kingdom announced in the 1998 Budget, £37.5 million a year was allocated for rural bus services in England. Final figures for actual spend in 1998–99 are not yet available but local authorities have previously estimated that they would spend £25 million in that financial year, reflecting the fact that less than a full year was available for spend.

Results from an interim survey of local authorities shows that by the end of 1998–99 over 550 new services are being operated as a result of the new finance, with a further 740 services improved in frequency or coverage. We are undertaking with local authorities a fuller survey of the results of the new funding. Data on the precise number of additional bus journeys are not available.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the rural transport partnership scheme. [81265]

Dr. Reid: The Government have provided £4.2 million per annum for the Rural Transport Partnership scheme. The overarching aim of the scheme is to promote social inclusion by enhancing rural transport services and securing a long-term improvement in the accessibility of rural people to jobs, services and social activity. The Countryside Agency is working to stimulate interest in the scheme and is providing advice to prospective partnerships. A number of schemes have been accepted for funding, and I look forward to seeing the fruits of these partnerships soon.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the steps taken since 1 May 1997 to reduce total carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector. [81267]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Action to reduce CO_2 emissions from transport is a key element of our approach to tackling climate change. Since coming into office, this Government have taken a number of measures designed to reduce transport CO_2 emissions. These include the integrated transport measures detailed in last year's White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport", the proposed reforms of vehicle excise duty and company car taxation, and also raising the annual increase in fuel duty to 6 per cent. In addition, we fully support the European Union's strategy for reducing CO_2 emissions from cars, including the voluntary agreement with European car manufacturers, which commits them to a 25 per cent. reduction in average new car fuel consumption by 2008.

Sale West Race Course Estate

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which hon. Members have made representations to his Department in relation to the proposed transfer of the Sale West Race Course Estate, located in the Altrincham and Sale, West constituency. [81255]

Mr. Raynsford: In addition to the hon. Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes), has made representations in connection with the proposed transfer of the Sale West Race Course Estate.

Packaging Waste

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Elmet, (Mr. Burgon), of 28 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *335–37*, by

what date consultation with EU member states relating to his proposed amendments to the packaging waste regulations is planned to begin. [81389]

Mr. Meacher: Some amendments have already been notified to the European Commission and others will be notified as soon as possible.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the members appointed to the Board of the Countryside Agency, *(b)* the date of their appointment, *(c)* their salaries and *(d)* their other occupations. [81149]

Mr. Meacher: The members of the Board of the Countryside Agency are as follows:

Ewen Cameron FRICS DL (Chairman)
Cllr. Pam Warhurst (Deputy Chair)
Kate Ashbrook
Janet Bradbury
Right Rev. Alan Chesters
Martin Doughty
Dr. Victoria Edwards
Prof. Philip Lowe
Catherine Mack
Miles Middleton CBE FCA
Frances Rowe
David Woodhall CBE.

All appointments run from 1 April 1999. The Chairman's salary is £41,620 a year; Ewen Cameron does not intend to draw the full amount. The Deputy Chair's salary is £12,950 a year. All other members will receive an annual salary of £5, 975.

I will write to the hon. Member about Board members' other occupations after confirming the details with those involved.

Herbicides

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has commissioned on the effects on biodiversity of the increased use of herbicides in farming. [81253]

Mr. Meacher: My Department, together with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, commissioned a report on the indirect effects of pesticides, including herbicides, on birds which was published in 1997. Further research on this topic is being funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food which funds a wide programme of research on the effects of pesticides. My Department intends to commission a complementary study this year.

Railtrack

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he will take, pursuant to the publication of Railtrack's Network Management Statement, to facilitate fulfilment of the proposed investment programme. [81356]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We made it clear at the National Rail Summit in February that the Government are prepared to work in partnership with the railway industry to deliver a better rail service and increased investment. But Railtrack must play its part in creating a high quality, high growth, high investment railway. We have appointed Sir Alastair Morton to lead the shadow Strategic Rail Authority, and Tom Winsor as Rail Regulator, to ensure that that investment is delivered.

Passenger Rail Franchises

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the key criteria for the renegotiation of passenger rail franchises; and if he will make a statement. [81362]

Dr. Reid: We announced at the National Rail Summit on 25 February that all requests for franchise re-negotiations will be judged against the following criteria: current performance; proposed accelerated or new investment; willingness to commit to a more demanding enforcement regime and higher quality standards; willingness to give passengers a greater say in the level and standard of services; willingness to commit to initiatives which would promote integrated transport; and value for the taxpayer.

Rail Summit

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the purpose of the rail summit next Spring, indicating the date on which it will be held. [81354]

Dr. Reid: The purpose of the next National Rail Summit will be to review progress with the rail industry's commitment to deliver real year-on-year performance improvements and to maintain the momentum created by the Summit on 25 February. No date has yet been fixed for the next Summit.

National Cycling Strategy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will next publish an assessment of the National Cycling Strategy; and if he will make a statement. [81358]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Good progress continues to be made on achieving the objectives of the National Cycling Strategy (NCS). A second year report will be published shortly by the Department on behalf of the National Cycling Forum, which is co-ordinating and monitoring progress in implementing the NCS.

Railways

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the growth in *(a)* freight and *(b)* passenger volumes on the railways since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [81355]

Dr. Reid: During 1997–98, freight tonne kilometres on the railway grew by 12 per cent. and total passenger journeys grew by 6 per cent. For the half year from April to September 1998, freight tonne kilometres grew by 7 per cent. and total passenger journeys by 5 per cent. over the corresponding period in the previous year. We are achieving our goal of winning more passengers and freight on to the railways.

Council Tax Rebates

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce legislation to give council tax rebates to elderly people living alone. [81271]

Ms Armstrong: Elderly people who live alone, as with other single person households, are already entitled to a 25 per cent. reduction in their council tax. We believe that additional help with council tax bills should be given to people on low incomes through the means tested benefit system. There are already special provisions for pensioners which mean that they are entitled to council tax benefit at higher levels of income than most other people.

Lake Windermere

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to make a statement on the review concerning the proposed 10 mph speed limit on Lake Windermere. [80810]

Mr. Meale: The Windermere Navigation (Amendment) (No. 2) Byelaws 1992 are before the Secretary of State for his decision whether or not to confirm them. We are considering representations from a large number of individuals and organisations and hope to make an announcement shortly.

GJW

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the meetings his Department has had with the lobbying firm GJW since 1 May 1997. [81583]

Mr. Meale: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report,* column *168.*

HOME DEPARTMENT

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 9 March concerning a constituent (HO Reference 4068/99). [80800]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 15 April.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79630]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on 13 April 1999, *Official Report,* column *66.*

Uninsured Vehicles

Mr. Caplin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many proceedings there have been at magistrates' courts for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks in each of the past five years. [80471]

Mr. Boateng: The numbers of proceedings at magistrates' courts for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks in each of the past five years, are given in the table.

Proceedings at magistrates' courts for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks England and Wales

Year	*Number of offences*
1993	446,568
1994	446,559
1995	441,241
1996	415,015
1997 (provisional)	396,912

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80527]

Mr. Straw: I refer to the reply which my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave on 14 April 1999, *Official Report,* columns *239–40.* This referred to the Action Plan I published on 23 March containing the detailed response to the recommendations of the Macpherson Inquiry. That plan is a long term programme to deliver permanent improvements to policing in every area.

The plan makes it clear that progress on policing must be part of a wider context and commits the Government to setting out, over coming months, how they will take forward their wider vision of an anti-racist society. I have already announced that the Government will legislate to extend the Race Relations Act 1976 not just to the police service as the Inquiry recommended but across all public services.

I will take personal responsibility for oversight of this programme. I am, therefore, establishing a steering group which I will chair which will include members from the police service, other relevant organisations as well as substantial representation from minority ethnic communities. The steering group will meet for the first time next month.

The Home Office Management Board has been working since early 1998 on taking forward at corporate level the commitment to race equality within the department. The Departmental Race Equality Action Plan includes commitments by the Board agreed following its first race equality training day in October 1998. Since publication of the Inquiry report, the Management Board held a further race equality seminar on 25–26 March and identified progress to date and further action points to take forward the Departmental Race Equality Action Plan.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80414]

Kate Hoey: The Treaty of Amsterdam will, in general, have minimal impact on the responsibilities of my Department and its staffing. However, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 12 March 1999, *Official Report,* columns *380–82*, we are seeking to participate in certain areas of co-operation hitherto embodied in the Schengen agreements which are being incorporated into the European Union Treaty framework. These are new areas of co-operation for the Home Office. It will not be possible to assess the resource and other implications of such participation until the necessary negotiations are concluded.

Consultations (Postal Costs)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will pay the postal costs of voluntary bodies and registered charities requested to respond to Government consultation documents; and if he will make a statement. [80921]

Mr. Straw: When voluntary bodies and registered charities are invited to respond to a Home Office consultation paper, postal costs are not automatically covered. However, each case is considered on its merits, taking account of such factors as the scale of the consultation exercise and the nature of the information requested.

The Home Office does not pay postal costs incurred by organisations responding to consultation documents from other Government Departments. It is a matter for individual Departments to decide whether to cover these.

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times Ministers in his Department met their counterparts in the US Administration between 1 January 1998 and 1 June 1998, indicating the dates and locations of each meeting, the Ministers involved and the name of the US counterpart. [80830]

Mr. Straw: I met the United States Attorney-General, Janet Reno, on 6 February 1998, during a visit to Washington, and have spoken to her by telephone from time to time.

Between January and June 1998, there have been no other meetings between Ministers in my Department and their United States counterparts.

Kosovo Liberation Army

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what staff under his control are engaged in monitoring criminal activity by elements of the Kosovo Liberation Army; what is the nature of that activity; and if he will make a statement. [81243]

Mr. Straw: The investigation of criminal activity is an operational police matter and responsibility rests with the Chief Officer of the force in the area concerned.

I am not aware of any evidence that members of the Kosovo Liberation Army are committing criminal offences in this country.

Mutual Legal Assistance

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns *726–27*, if he will make a further statement on the Government's policy in respect of proposals discussed at the meeting in Brussels of the European Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance as they relate to the interception of communications. [81274]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) on 23 and 25 March 1999, *Official Report,* columns *176* and *384* respectively.

Prison Service (Portland)

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly by the Prison Service in the three prison establishments in Portland. [81254]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is given in the table.

Prison service staff employed at Portland prisons as at 31 March 1999

Prison	*Number of directly employed staff*	*Number of indirectly employed staff*[1]
Portland	285.5	71
The Verne	268	47.5
Weare	200	46

[1] These figures include: education staff, probation staff, healthcare staff, chaplaincy staff, drug counsellors, ship's crew (Weare), hairdressers and librarians. The figures do not include works contractors.

Braille Template

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made on developing a Braille template to enable blind people to vote in person and unaided. [81066]

Mr. George Howarth: It has not so far proved possible to develop a practicable proposal, but I am always ready to consider suggestions in this area.

Polling Stations (Access)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much his Department has spent in each of the last five years on the making of grants to local authorities for the purpose of improving access to polling places; and how much he expects to spend in the current year; [81067]

(2) how many local authorities in each of the last five years have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* received grants for the purpose of improving access to polling places; and what was the average amount of grant paid to a local authority in each year. [81068]

Mr. George Howarth: The information requested is set out in the tables. These show grants from central exchequer for the purchase or hire of temporary ramps to improve access to polling places for the years from 1994–95 to 1998–99 and, separately, grants provided for polling screens adapted for use by disabled voters. These latter figures are available separately only for 1997–98 and 1998–99. There is no limit on the level of grants provided for these purposes and local authorities are actively encouraged to apply for them.

Grants for purchase/hire of temporary ramps

	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Number of local authorities applying	27	22	20	36	18
Number of local authorities receiving grants	27	22	20	36	18
Total amount granted for year (£)	71,481	34,500	47,069	62,043	21,146
Average per authority (£)	2,647	1,568	2,353	1,723	1,175

Grants for the purchase of adapted polling screens

	1997–98	1998–99
Number of local authorities applying	27	22
Number of local authorities receiving grants	27	22
Total amount granted for year (£)	138,298	109,855
Average per authority (£)	5,122	4,993

Augusto Pinochet

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to exercise his discretion regarding the proposed extradition of Augusto Pinochet following the most recent decision of the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords. [81365]

Mr. Straw: I refer to the reply I gave on 15 April 1999, *Official Report,* columns *311–16,* to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time spent in prison on remand by those *(a)* under the age of 25 years and *(b)* of all ages; what percentage of those people are found guilty and given custodial sentences; what is the average age of remand prisoners; what plans he has to review the system of remand; and if he will make a statement. [81260]

Mr. George Howarth: Provisional information on the estimated average number of days in custody for untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners held in prisons in England and Wales in 1998, by age, is given in the table. During 1998, the average age of all untried prisoners was 29 years, whilst for all convicted unsentenced prisoners it was 27 years.

The available information on the numbers remanded to custody that subsequently received a custodial sentence is for 1997 and shows that 42 per cent. of all persons remanded were sentenced to immediate custody. This information is published in "Criminal statistics England and Wales" (table 8.8 of the 1997 edition), a copy of which is in the Library.

Remand decisions are a matter for the courts in the exercise of their judicial discretion in accordance with the Bail Act 1976. We have no plans to alter the present arrangements.

Estimated average time spent in custody for untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners in prisons in England and Wales in 1998, by age [1]

Age unsentenced [1]	Estimated average number of days in custody [2] Untried [4]	Convicted
Aged under 25 years	39	37
All ages	46	38

[1] Provisional figures
[2] Estimated from number of receptions and average population
[3] Time spent in Prison Service establishments after conviction
[4] Time spent in Prison Service establishments before conviction

Home Office Business Plan

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a Home Office business plan for 1999–2000. [81479]

Mr. Straw: The Home Office Business Plan for 1999–2000 is being published today.

The Business Plan complements the Home Office Annual Report—published on 26 March—and provides a comprehensive picture of Home Office aims, objectives, resources, performance measures and targets for 1999–2000. This includes the high level Home Office targets set out in the White Paper "Public Services for the Future: Modernisation, Reform, Accountability. Comprehensive Spending Review: Public Service Agreements 1999–2002" published in December 1998.

Copies of the Business Plan have been placed in the Library and are available on the Home Office web site on the internet.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

National Overseas Debts

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list those countries that are classified as poor countries which have had national overseas debts written off within the last 12 months. [80641]

Clare Short: We classify poor countries as those listed in Part 1 of the Development Assistance Committee List of Aid Recipients. In the 1998–99 financial year the following countries benefited from debt write-offs for outstanding aid loans made by my Department.

Afghanistan
Antigua and Barbuda
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belize
Botswana
Cote D'Ivoire
Dominica
Egypt
Ethiopia
Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Guyana
Honduras
Indonesia
Jamaica
Jordan
Laos
Malawi
Mauritius
Mozambique
Nicaragua
Pakistan
Peru
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Solomon Islands
Sri Lanka
St. Lucia
Sudan
Turks and Cairos Islands
Tonga
Western Samoa
Zambia.

Kosovo

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she has taken to ensure that privately donated aid destined for refugees from Kosovo is not being delayed by unnecessary bureaucracy; and if she will investigate the reasons for a lorry loaded by NMT Crane Hire of Bedfordshire with aid not being allowed to leave Bishops Stortford for Albania during the past week. [81106]

Clare Short: My Department is taking an international lead in urgently working for organisation of the humanitarian relief effort for refugees from Kosovo. The problem to date has not been lack of resources but inadequate organisation. We have no knowledge of the problems to which the hon. Gentleman's questions refers.

We greatly welcome the spontaneous generosity of the British people but we are fully stretched attempting to improve the effectiveness of the international system.

We have discussed this issue with the Disasters Emergency Committee which is the alliance of charities co-ordinating private contributions for Kosovo. We are informed that even as organisational arrangements improve, the priority for private donations will be to receive financial contributions rather than material ones.

HEALTH

Nurses

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision has been made for funding courses for general nurses not in employment to convert to Level One. [80261]

Mr. Denham: In September 1998 we announced an investment of £50 million from the Modernisation Fund to support initiatives which widen access to nursing and midwifery diploma programmes. This funding is for the period 1999 to 2002 and covers the costs of enabling enrolled nurses to retrain/upgrade their qualifications and return to the National Health Service. The funding will also enable existing NHS staff (previously only available for Health Care Assistants) to access pre-registration nursing and midwifery diploma programmes. The cost of expanding part time and flexible pre-registration nursing and midwifery diploma programmes is also being met from this investment in order to give those who might not normally be able to access nursing and midwifery education, for example those with family responsibilities, the opportunity to do so.

Interstitial Cystitis

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support his Department is giving to the sufferers of interstitial cystitis; how much funding his Department has donated in the last five years to research into the causes of interstitial cystitis; and what action his Department is taking to encourage research into the treatment of interstitial cystitis. [80237]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service provides investigations, care and treatment for people with interstitial cystitis. There is already a body of international research evidence published in the world-wide literature, and some NHS research has been supported through the NHS research and development levy. In addition, the Medical Research Council welcomes high quality research applications into any aspect of human health and regional offices of the NHS Executive run response mode funding schemes for NHS research proposals.

A and E Departments

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money will be available to the accident and emergency departments at *(a)* Ashford, Middlesex Hospital and *(b)* St. Peter's, Chertsey Hospital in the financial year 1999–2000 in addition to the money allocated under his three year plan. [80428]

Mr. Denham: Negotiations with local commissioners about overall funding for the new combined Ashford and St. Peter's National Health Service Trust in 1999–2000 are currently being concluded.

The accident and emergency team led by Mike Lambert, accident and emergency consultant at Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, are presently reviewing bids for

funds as part of the accident and emergency modernisation programme and final decisions will be taken shortly.

Multiple Sclerosis

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of multiple sclerosis specialist nursing on patient care. [80597]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not made an assessment of the impact of multiple sclerosis specialist nursing on patient care. However, we will continue to liaise with the Multiple Sclerosis Society who have set up a £2 million fund for the development of specialist nursing.

Maternity Units

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* professional and *(b)* lay members of the intercollegiate working party convened to set criteria for the restructuring or closure of maternity units; and what are its remit and terms of reference. [80598]

Mr. Hutton: The Multidisciplinary Working Party to Consider Maternity Services is an intercollegiate working party set up by the Royal Colleges of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, Midwives, and Paediatrics and Child Health.

The current membership of the Multidisciplinary Working Party to Consider Maternity Services is as follows:

Professor W. Dunlop FRCOG, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist (Chairman)

Mr. A. J. Evans MRCOG, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist

Mr. R. J. Porter FRCOG, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist

Dr. K. Dodd FRCPH, Consultant Paediatrician

Professor A. Wilkinson FRCPH, Neonatal Paediatrics

Ms H. Camm, Head of Midwifery Services

Dr. S. Downe, Research Midwife

Dr. G. Lewis, Principal Medical Officer, Department of Health.

The Working Party is not funded by the Department of Health. It is a new group and first met on 18 February.

The Working Party's current terms of reference are to set criteria for consideration when restructuring or closing maternity units.

Lamotrigine

Mr. Lock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many deaths have been reported to his Department since the drug, Lamotrigine, has been licensed for use in Britain arising out of or related to the use of this drug or arising out of or connected to side effects suspected to be related to the use of this drug; [67007]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *656–57*, on Lamotrigine, how many suspected deaths have been reported to his Department or the Medicines Control Agency arising out of or related to Lamotrigine. [80230]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* There have been a total of 1,333 reports of suspected adverse drug reactions (ADRs) made via the UK spontaneous reporting scheme (the Yellow Card Scheme) associated with lamotrigine, of which 42 were fatal. Eighteen of the fatalities were associated with convulsions (the condition for which the drug was prescribed) and therefore it is difficult to establish what role, if any, the drug played in these cases. In general, doctors are asked to report suspected adverse drug reactions via the Yellow Card Scheme and therefore it is not possible to definitely attribute causality. Factors such as the patients' underlying illnesses and other medication may have contributed to the reactions.

Primary Care Groups

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* Conservative, *(b)* Liberal Democrat and *(c)* Labour councillors have been appointed to primary care group boards. [81390]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available centrally. The details we are currently collecting on the composition of Primary Care Group Boards will not include party political affiliation.

Joint Investment Plans

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the client groups that will be covered by the joint investment plans that health authorities and social services departments will be required to produce during 1999–2000. [81252]

Mr. Hutton: Health authorities and social services departments were required, by April 1999, to produce joint investment plans for older people, including those with mental health problems, with preparatory information to support the National Service Framework for mental health services. We are considering what other client groups will be covered from April 2000 and will issue guidance shortly.

Teenage Pregnancies

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Social Exclusion Unit to report its findings on the investigation into teenage pregnancies. [81071]

Ms Jowell: There has been extensive consultation with interested organisations and individuals from outside Government and with young people and parents on the Teenage Pregnancy report.

The report will be published shortly.

Emergency Contraception

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if emergency contraception will be available in the health shop scheme. [81072]

Ms Jowell: The first 20 "Walk-in" Centres will be set up during this year. Services provided in each centre will be based on an assessment of local needs, which may include the need for additional access to contraceptive advice or services.

TREASURY

Children's Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the rate at which a tax credit for pre-school children could have been introduced into the proposed working families tax credit if it were to be financed by not introducing the proposed childcare tax credit. [76100]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The cost of the childcare tax credit in the Working Families Tax Credit is estimated to be about £200 million in 2000–01, the first full year of the tax credit. If the childcare tax credit within Working Families Tax Credit was not introduced and the money spent instead on an additional tax credit for children under 5, then, taking into account reductions in income related benefits, the credit could be set at about £5 a week on top of the rates announced by the Chancellor in the Budget.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is the Inland Revenue's policy to warn taxpayers that they are likely to issue a section 20 Taxes Management Act 1970 notice in circumstances where a taxpayer appeals against a section 19A Taxes Management Act 1970 notice for information. [80256]

Dawn Primarolo: The powers in section 19A and section 20 Taxes Management Act 1970 are not mutually exclusive. However, the Inland Revenue would not normally issue a notice under section 20 in order to obtain information that they had failed to obtain under section 19A. Very rarely, it might become clear, after the taxpayer had appealed against a section 19A notice, that section 20 was in fact the more appropriate section to use. A notice under section 20 cannot be issued by an inspector unless the taxpayer has failed to take an opportunity to provide the information voluntarily, and may be issued only with the consent of an independent Appeal Commissioner.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Inland Revenue has paid in incorrect tax repayments as a result of processing errors since the introduction of self-assessment. [80259]

Dawn Primarolo: In 1997–98 the Revenue made 2.180 million self assessment repayments and a further 2.812 million in 1998–99, totalling £1.536 billion and £2.431 billion respectively. The Revenue has processes in place designed to ensure that its staff accurately capture information from returns on to their computer systems. It also has processes in place designed specifically to risk assess repayments both before and after they are issued. It has no evidence to suggest that tax was over or under repaid as a result of processing errors in other than a very small number of cases.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what Inland Revenue review process takes place to ensure processing errors are detected. [80258]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue carries out various activities in Self Assessment to ensure that processing errors are avoided or detected. These include full training for staff on carrying out processing work, computer validations on the processing of information, reviews by staff to ensure they have captured information correctly, and quality monitoring of processing work after the event.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Inland Revenue has to improve the presentation of statements of account for self-assessment purposes. [80257]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue has made a number of improvements to the presentation of the statements of account since they were introduced. Further improvements are planned before the next widespread issue of statements of account in January 2000. All improvements are subject to consultation with the main representative bodies, including accountancy bodies, and revised statements are tested for usability with taxpayers before changes are introduced.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of Inland Revenue correspondence from taxpayers is *(a)* replied to and *(b)* replied to with a substantive reply within 28 days. [80142]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not publish its performance against annual targets until appropriate validation and checking of figures has been carried out.

On latest provisional information, the Department is on course to meet its 1998–99 target of 75 per cent. for providing replies to correspondence, which includes correspondence from taxpayers, within 28 days.

In 1997–98 the Inland Revenue dealt with about 85 million items of post. The Department provided a full response within 28 days in 74 per cent. of cases.[1]

Note:

Figures are for the Inland Revenue's network of local offices which is administered by ten Regional Executive Offices.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Inland Revenue target for dealing with taxpayers' correspondence; and what is the procedure for opening and logging such correspondence. [80143]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue target for dealing with correspondence within 28 calendar days, which includes taxpayers' correspondence, was 75 per cent. in 1998–99.

The target for 1999–2000 is under discussion. The final figure will be included in the Inland Revenue Plan which is expected to be published in May.

The Department has a procedure in place to measure performance against its customer service standard of responding fully to all correspondence within 28 days. The procedure involves offices sampling a representative number of items of correspondence over the year, and monitoring the time taken to provide a full reply to every question or issue raised.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which department of the Inland Revenue is responsible for the collection of form P14. [80584]

Dawn Primarolo: The local tax office is responsible for the collection of forms P14.

Capital Allowance

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of *(a)* increasing the existing 40 per cent. first year capital allowance to 100 per cent. on a permanent basis and *(b)* the additional cost of extending these allowances to assets leased by SMEs. [R] [80495]

Dawn Primarolo: If the extension by one year of 40 per cent. first year allowances for SMEs announced in the Budget were made permanent and increased to 100 per cent., the additional Exchequer cost would be £0.75 billion in 2000–01 and £1.3 billion in 2001–02. From 2002–03, annual costs would decrease steadily to reach £0.5 billion a year.

The cost of extending these allowances to include assets leased by SMEs is not available.

Additional Personal Tax Allowance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are currently entitled to the additional personal tax allowance; and how many of those men and women are (i) parents and (ii) carers; [80935]

(2) what is the current take-up rate of the additional personal tax allowance; and what estimate he has made of the additional cost should full take-up occur. [80936]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* I regret that no information is available on either the total number of people eligible to claim the additional personal allowance or on the proportion who are carers. Therefore no estimates can be made of the take-up rates or of the additional cost should full take-up occur.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of UK vehicle excise duty rates on the competitiveness of the UK haulage industry, with particular reference to the rates of duty for *(a)* 40 and *(b)* 41 tonne articulated lorries. [81359]

Mr. Milburn: In formulating vehicle taxation policy the Government give careful consideration to its overall effects on the UK road haulage industry.

Correspondence

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for North Essex of 6 March concerning the road haulage industry and the Budget. [81361]

Ms Hewitt: I have done so.

Fixed Profit Car Scheme

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the fixed profit car scheme in respect of the relationship between engine size and mileage rates. [81269]

Ms Hewitt: None.

Payroll Software

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which software house will be preparing the new Government-supported standard payroll software for small employers and at what cost to *(a)* the Exchequer and *(b)* the user. [80815]

Mr. Wills: I have been asked to reply.

There are a number of options available for delivering the Automated Payroll System (APS) which we are currently considering. No decisions have yet been made.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80529]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *239–40*.

Multi-disciplinary Partnerships

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to permit the development of multi-disciplinary partnerships in the legal profession; and if he will make a statement. [R] [81094]

Mr. Hoon: This is a matter for the legal professional bodies. The rules of the Bar Council and the Law Society prohibit such arrangements. The Bar Council has no current plans for change. The Law Society issued a consultation paper in October 1998 on the possibility of allowing solicitors to enter multi-disciplinary partnerships; the responses are currently being analysed. Under the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990, it could fall to the Lord Chancellor and the designated judges to approve any proposed changes to those rules, if such changes came into the scope of Schedule 4 of that Act.

Complaints Procedures

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the complaints procedures applying *(a)* to solicitors and *(b)* to barristers; and if he will make a statement. [R] [81095]

Mr. Hoon: Government plans for the handling of complaints about members of the legal professional bodies were announced during the Second Reading of the Access to Justice Bill on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns 230–325. There is currently a good deal of public concern that the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors is failing to deal adequately with complaints. The Government share this concern. We therefore propose to establish a new post with the responsibility for setting targets for complaints handling and making recommendations about complaints systems. These powers would, however, be held in reserve unless and until the professions are seen not to be making real progress; that progress will be measured against targets which the bodies would be encouraged to set. The new powers would cover all the authorised bodies including the Law Society, the Bar Council and the Institute of Legal Executives.

Barristers (Limited Liability)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to permit barristers to practise in *(a)* partnerships and *(b)* limited liability companies; and if he will make a statement. [81094]

Mr. Hoon: This is a matter for the General Council of the Bar. Practising barristers are currently prohibited by their professional rules from entering into partnerships. Under the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990, it could fall to the Lord Chancellor and the designated judges to approve any proposed changes to those rules, if such changes came into the scope of Schedule 4 of that Act.

Stow-on-the-Wold Magistrates Court

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from *(a)* Gloucestershire County Council and *(b)* other parties opposing the proposed closure of Stow-on-the-Wold Magistrates Court; when he expects to make a final decision on the future of that court; and if he will make a statement. [81259]

Mr. Hoon: Gloucestershire Magistrates Courts Committee has determined to close the Stow-on-the-Wold Magistrates Court with effect from 1 July 1999. Gloucestershire County Council has appealed against this determination. A total of 21 other representation, opposed to the proposed closure, have been received.

The appeal process is proceeding. The two parties are being given the opportunity to put their case forward and make comments. This will continue until both parties are satisfied that they have nothing further to add. A final decision will not be made until that time. Magistrates courts are locally managed by magistrates' courts committee under the provisions of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997. Decisions concerning the future of magistrates courts in their area are for the relevant magistrates courts committee to determine. A local authority that contributes financially may appeal to the Lord Chancellor against a proposed closure. The procedure for such appeals is set out in section 56 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997.

WALES

Primary Care Groups

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many primary care groups are operative in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [80837]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: On 1 April, 22 Local Health Groups became operational as sub committees of their health authorities. They are expected to make a major contribution in three main areas:

the development of health improvement programmes

developing the principles of clinical governance to improve the quality of primary health care; and

informing and developing the commissioning of hospital and community health services.

Local Health Groups are coterminous with unitary authorities, with representatives of the local authorities on their boards; which will allow for more effective use of resources across the range of health and social services expenditure.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* new money he has given to primary care groups. [80836]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Welsh Office guidance on establishing Local Health Groups was issued in October, followed by guidance on Remuneration and Human Resource, issued in December 1998.

£8.9 million previously used for the GP Fundholder Management allowance will be allocated to health authorities this year to cover the start up and operating costs of LHGs.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the level of NHS dentistry in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [80838]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: In Wales at the end of September 1998, 60 per cent. of children and 46 per cent. of adults were registered with NHS dentists, having visited them at least once during the preceding 15 months.

NHS net spending on general dental services in Wales in 1997/98 rose to £56.2 million, a 6 per cent. increase over the previous year. Over the same period, the number of courses of NHS treatment, for adults in Wales, rose by nearly 7 per cent. to 1.446 million. The number of dentists treating patients under NHS arrangements in Wales reached an all-time high of 960 by the end of 1998.

The Welsh Office dental initiative, first launched in 1995, has enabled Welsh Health Authorities to offer unprecedented levels of grant (up to £50,000 in some areas) to attract new dentists and for the expansion of the Community Dental Service. It has been very successful for Wales as a whole but there are still some areas where certain categories of patients may find it difficult to register with an NHS dentist close to home.

The initiative was modified and re-launched in July 1998. The modified scheme provides more flexibility in terms of the extent and length of commitment required and offers more flexible conditions which are specifically designed to address the particular problems of rural areas.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made

of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80531]

Ms Hodge: The Home Office published an Action Plan on 23 March containing the Government's detailed response to the specific recommendation of the Macpherson inquiry. The plan commits the Government to setting out over the coming months how they will take forward their broader vision of an anti-racist society.

The Government have already announced that they will legislate to apply the Race Relations Act 1976 not just to the police service, but across public services as whole. The Government are seeking to ensure that policy development takes account of any race equality implications.

There were three recommendations that related specifically to education and a detailed response to them is contained in the Action Plan.

In summary, the Government agree that the National Curriculum must properly reflect the needs of a diverse society and we are actively considering the recommendation for preventing and addressing racism in schools. Guidance will be issued to make it clear that schools must record all racist incidents and this information will be made available to parents, governors and Local Education Authorities. The Government do not, however, agree with the recommendation to publish the number of racist incidents on a school by school basis, which would risk discouraging the reporting of racist incidents. On inspection of schools, Ofsted will ensure that the important issues raised in the report are addressed during inspections and that appropriate training is put in place for Inspectors.

Work Permits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many work permits were granted during the last 12 months. [80644]

Ms Hodge: During the 12-month period from 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999 a total of 68,527 work permits were granted.

Grant Maintained Schools

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will state aggregated by local education authority and for the three most recent years for which information is available *(a)* the total annual maintenance grant paid to grant maintained schools, *(b)* the total annual maintenance grant paid to grant maintained schools divided by the number of pupils, *(c)* the total of special purpose and other non-capital grants paid to grant maintained schools and *(d)* the total of special purpose and other non-capital grants paid to grant maintained schools divided by the number of pupils. [80671]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* The calculation of the annual maintenance grants (AMG), and of the special purpose and other non-capital grants (SPGs) for Grant Maintained (GM) schools, has been a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have placed in the Library tables which contain figures for the AMG by Local Education Authority, both in total and per pupil, for the years 1998–99, 1997–98 and 1996–97. The tables also give figures for SPGs, both in total and per pupil, for the years 1997–98 and 1996–97. These figures have been calculated using data recently provided by the Funding Agency.

School Budgets

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each local education authority in England for the three most recent years for which information is available *(a)* the budgeted expenditure per pupil and *(b)* the total budgeted expenditure within (i) the aggregate schools' budget, (ii) the general schools' budget and (iii) the general schools' budget allocated to capital charges. [80670]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* I have placed in the Library a table which shows, for each local education authority in England for the financial years 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99, *(a)* the budgeted expenditure per pupil and *(b)* the total budgeted expenditure each within (i) the Aggregated Schools Budget, (ii) the General Schools Budget and (iii) the General Schools Budget allocated to capital.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average length of time spent on the Gateway of the New Deal for 18 to 25-year-olds by those *(a)* going directly into unsubsidised employment, *(b)* entering each of the New Deal Options subsequently chosen, *(c)* transferring to other benefits, *(d)* taking other options and *(e)* for whom no ultimate destination is known. [81110]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information set out in the following table shows the average length of time spent on the New Deal Gateway by immediate destination, for those young people who had left the Gateway by the end of January 1999.

Destination on leaving the Gateway	*Average length of time spent on Gateway (in days)*
Unsubsidised employment	70
Options	
Employer Option	68
Full-time Education or Training Option	91
Voluntary Sector Option	123
Environment Task Force Option	128
Other benefits	79
Other known destinations	82
Unknown destinations	76

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of those joining each of the options of the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds in each month since January 1998 have had *(a)* no qualifications *(b)* foundation level qualifications, *(c)* NVQ Level 1, *(d)* NVQ Level 2, *(e)* NVQ Level 3, *(f)* NVQ Level 4 and *(g)* other qualifications. [81093]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is set out in the following tables and is drawn from data listing qualifications supplied by the participant.

Percentage

	Highest qualification held on entry to New Deal							
	None	Other	Foundation	NVQ/SVQ Level 1	NVQ/SVQ Level 2	NVQ/SVQ Level 3	NVQ/SVQ Level 4+	Total
Month of entering of employer option								
January 1998	27	3	0	24	21	18	6	100
February 1998	16	2	8	26	38	7	3	100
March 1998	20	8	8	24	30	9	2	100
April 1998	26	8	8	16	30	7	5	100
May 1998	21	18	7	18	25	7	3	100
June 1998	24	22	7	14	24	6	2	100
July 1998	24	21	6	16	25	6	2	100
August 1998	27	23	7	12	23	6	2	100
September 1998	24	24	5	14	25	6	2	100
October 1998	26	23	6	14	23	6	2	100
November 1998	24	23	7	13	25	6	2	100
December 1998	23	24	6	12	28	5	2	100
January 1999	23	20	8	16	23	6	4	100
Total	24	21	7	15	25	6	2	100
Month of entering full time education and training option								
January 1998	29	0	0	18	41	0	12	100
February 1998	19	0	10	32	29	5	5	100
March 1998	24	3	13	25	28	4	4	100
April 1998	21	6	11	25	27	7	3	100
May 1998	26	6	11	23	22	6	6	100
June 1998	29	13	11	20	20	4	4	100
July 1998	30	16	10	18	20	4	2	100
August 1998	30	21	9	17	18	3	2	100
September 1998	27	24	7	16	21	4	1	100
October 1998	29	22	9	16	20	4	1	100
November 1998	32	19	9	16	18	4	2	100
December 1998	32	20	8	16	19	3	1	100
January 1998	33	20	8	17	17	3	2	100
Total	29	20	8	17	20	4	2	100
Month of entering voluntary sector option								
January 1998	0	0	20	0	0	40	40	100
February 1998	0	0	13	33	27	20	7	100
March 1998	13	3	13	11	45	8	8	100
April 1998	23	0	10	20	17	3	27	100
May 1998	16	9	11	17	25	12	11	100
June 1998	15	11	15	20	25	7	7	100
July 1998	23	15	11	18	21	6	6	100
August 1998	27	21	7	16	17	7	4	100
September 1998	29	24	8	14	15	7	3	100
October 1998	28	23	7	16	18	5	2	100
November 1998	29	23	6	14	20	5	2	100
December 1998	31	20	6	16	18	5	3	100
January 1999	32	19	8	15	18	6	2	100
Total	28	20	8	16	19	6	4	100
Month of entering environment task force option								
February 1998	14	0	14	0	14	29	29	100
March 1998	19	7	7	33	11	4	19	100
April 1998	27	4	15	17	21	6	10	100
May 1998	33	8	4	16	20	8	10	100
June 1998	35	4	17	20	16	4	5	100
July 1998	44	6	13	19	11	4	3	100
August 1998	43	12	12	15	14	4	1	100
September 1998	45	18	9	15	10	2	1	100
October 1998	48	16	8	14	11	2	1	100
November 1998	50	17	7	11	12	2	1	100
December 1998	49	15	8	14	10	2	0	100
January 1999	47	16	7	13	13	2	2	100
Total	46	15	9	14	12	3	2	100

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the procedure under the New Deal for Young Unemployed for dealing with a person who disappears from an option and then returns to claim benefit. [81363]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Young people who return to claim Jobseekers Allowance within 13 weeks of leaving a New Deal option are taken back into New Deal. All cases are referred to adjudication for a decision on whether the young person had "good cause" for leaving the option early.

Action Zones

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the first-round education action zones have applied to vary the details of their original bids; and if he will set out the details of such variations. [81144]

Ms Estelle Morris: None so far. Each EAZ submitted a detailed action plan on 31 March 1999. The action plans are currently being assessed and decisions on their approval will be made shortly.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the time limits on the existence of the education and employment action zones. [80893]

Ms Estelle Morris: Education Action Zones are established for three years in the first instance. Zones which are successfully meeting their aims and targets for raising standards, and can continue to contribute significantly to raising standards, will be extended to five years; some may be extended beyond this.

Employment Action Zones will operate for two years in 14 areas, from April 2000, helping 48,000 long-term unemployed people find and keep work.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 27 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *293*, if he will list the expenditure by his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on *(a)* market research, *(b)* conferences, *(c)* direct mail, *(d)* advertising and publicity, *(e)* web sites, *(f)* hospitality, *(g)* salaries and relevant expenses of administrative staff and *(h)* external consultants and advisers which is included in the expenditure on education action zones.. [81152]

Ms Estelle Morris: Expenditure, during the financial year 1998–99, was as follows:

	£
(a) Market research	0
(b) Conferences	254,735
(c) Direct mail	3,496
(d) Advertising and publicity	124,825
(e) Website	0
(f) Hospitality	1,200
(g) Central administration costs	539,693
(h) External consultants and advisers	219,202

Single Teacher Classes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what was the average size of single teacher classes for Key Stage One pupils in January 1999 *(a)* in each local education authority and *(b)* in total; and what were the corresponding figures in January 1998; [80684]

(2) what was the average size of single teacher classes for Key Stage Two pupils in January 1999 *(a)* in each local education authority and *(b)* in total; and what were the corresponding figures in January 1998. [80685]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* The information requested is shown in the following table.

Key stage 1 and 2 classes, average class size of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools. Local Education Authority areas, January 1998 and 1999

	Key Stage 1		*Key Stage 2*	
	1998	*1999 (provisional)*	*1998*	*1999 (provisional)*
England	27.1	26.5	28.3	28.4
North East	26.9	25.8	27.8	27.6
Hartlepool	27.9	25.7	28.2	28.0
Middlesbrough	26.7	26.0	27.5	27.2
Redcar and Cleveland	26.8	26.1	27.9	27.3
Stockton-on-Tees	26.7	26.0	28.3	27.8
Darlington	29.3	25.9	29.2	28.4
Durham	27.2	29.4	29.1	30.2
Northumberland	27.3	25.9	29.0	28.4
Gateshead	25.8	25.4	26.6	26.9
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	27.4	25.4	27.8	27.7
North Tyneside	27.2	26.5	27.6	27.5
South Tyneside	27.0	25.0	26.7	26.8
Sunderland	25.2	24.7	26.4	26.6
North West and Merseyside	27.5	26.6	28.5	28.6
North West	27.7	26.7	28.7	28.9
Cheshire[1]	26.4	—	28.0	—
Cheshire[2]	—	26.4	—	28.3
Halton	—	24.9	—	27.8
Warrington	—	27.3	—	28.8
Cumbria	25.7	25.0	26.7	26.8
Bolton	28.3	27.8	29.2	29.6
Bury	29.3	25.3	29.7	29.5
Manchester	27.1	26.6	27.9	28.1
Oldham	29.1	28.3	30.1	29.8
Rochdale	28.9	27.8	30.0	29.9
Salford	26.9	25.7	27.5	28.3
Stockport	28.1	27.1	29.1	29.2
Tameside	29.2	27.5	30.2	29.3

Key stage 1 and 2 classes, average class size of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools. Local Education Authority areas, January 1998 and 1999

	Key Stage 1		Key Stage 2	
	1998	1999 (provisional)	1998	1999 (provisional)
Trafford	28.7	27.8	29.3	29.2
Wigan	28.1	26.0	28.3	28.3
Lancashire[1]	28.3	—	29.6	—
Lancashire[2]	—	26.8	—	29.6
Blackburn and Darwen	—	28.4	—	29.7
Blackpool	—	28.7	—	31.1
Merseyside	26.9	26.3	27.6	27.6
Knowsley	27.4	27.2	28.5	28.1
Liverpool	26.7	26.2	27.2	27.0
St. Helens	27.3	26.8	28.2	28.5
Sefton	27.4	26.3	28.3	28.8
Wirral	26.0	25.6	27.0	26.8
Yorkshire and Humber	27.3	26.3	28.9	28.8
East Riding of Yorkshire	28.0	27.0	29.1	29.2
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	28.0	27.0	30.0	29.7
North East Lincolnshire	28.9	27.5	29.4	28.9
North Lincolnshire	28.5	23.9	28.9	28.6
York	26.2	25.4	29.0	28.0
North Yorkshire	25.5	25.0	28.[illegible]	28.2
Barnsley	27.6	26.8	30.4	30.1
Doncaster	28.0	27.6	28.4	28.5
Rotherham	25.8	24.8	29.4	28.9
Sheffield	25.9	24.9	27.3	27.3
Bradford	28.4	27.2	29.3	28.6
Calderdale	27.3	26.7	28.8	28.8
Kirklees	28.5	26.7	30.1	30.2
Leeds	27.7	26.9	28.4	28.7
Wakefield	27.4	26.8	29.5	29.3
East Midlands	26.8	25.9	28.9	28.9
Derby	28.5	24.8	30.7	30.9
Derbyshire	28.0	25.9	30.8	30.3
Leicester City	26.5	24.9	27.5	27.3
Rutland	25.4	25.1	26.1	27.0
Leicestershire	25.8	25.4	27.8	28.0
Lincolnshire	26.1	26.2	27.8	28.3
Northamptonshire	27.1	26.8	27.6	27.9
Nottinghamshire[1]	26.8	—	29.9	—
Nottinghamshire[2]	—	26.4	—	29.6
City of Nottingham	—	25.4	—	29.0
West Midlands	27.0	26.1	28.0	28.0
Hereford and Worcester	26.1	—	27.3	—
Herefordshire	—	24.0	—	27.0
Worcestershire	—	26.0	—	28.0
Shropshire[1]	25.2	—	29.1	—
Shropshire[2]	—	24.3	—	29.3
Telford and Wrekin	—	25.8	—	30.1
Stoke	26.7	26.0	27.6	27.5
Staffordshire	26.4	25.7	28.3	28.2
Warwickshire	27.7	26.3	29.2	28.7
Birmingham	27.5	27.2	27.5	27.6
Coventry	27.3	25.2	28.1	28.0
Dudley	26.6	26.6	26.7	26.6
Sandwell	28.4	25.7	29.0	28.9
Solihull	29.1	25.8	27.9	28.6
Walsall	26.3	26.2	28.6	27.7
Wolverhampton	27.7	27.8	26.7	27.4
Eastern	26.4	26.2	28.1	28.2
Luton	27.9	28.2	26.9	26.7
Bedfordshire	26.4	—	27.8	—
Bedfordshire	—	25.9	—	27.4
Peterborough	—	27.1	—	29.4
Cambridgeshire	27.8	27.4	29.3	29.8
Essex[1]	26.6	—	28.6	—
Essex[2]	—	26.5	—	28.7
Southend	—	27.4	—	29.5
Thurrock	—	26.4	—	28.6

Key stage 1 and 2 classes, average class size of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools. Local Education Authority areas, January 1998 and 1999

	Key Stage 1		Key Stage 2	
	1998	1999 (provisional)	1998	1999 (provisional)
Hertfordshire	26.6	26.0	28.0	28.2
Norfolk	26.1	25.8	27.4	27.0
Suffolk	24.1	24.1	26.3	26.3
London	27.2	27.1	27.6	27.7
Inner London	26.4	26.8	26.9	27.1
City of London	25.0	0.0	27.0	27.5
Camden	27.3	27.0	27.4	27.5
Hackney	25.6	26.4	26.2	26.8
Hammersmith and Fulham	24.9	25.6	26.7	26.7
Haringey	27.4	27.7	27.3	27.4
Islington	27.1	27.3	27.7	27.2
Kensington and Chelsea	24.8	24.8	25.8	26.3
Lambeth	26.1	26.6	26.0	26.3
Lewisham	25.9	26.5	26.5	26.9
Newham	27.8	28.0	28.8	28.9
Southwark	26.5	26.6	27.1	27.2
Tower Hamlets	26.8	27.0	27.4	27.3
Wandsworth	25.8	26.3	25.2	25.7
Westminster	22.9	24.5	25.6	26.2
Outer London	27.6	27.3	27.9	28.0
Barking and Dagenham	27.4	27.6	26.5	26.9
Barnet	27.4	27.3	26.3	26.6
Bexley	28.9	27.2	29.5	29.6
Brent	26.2	27.3	26.9	26.5
Bromley	28.5	27.2	29.2	28.6
Croydon	28.2	27.6	28.4	28.4
Ealing	27.5	26.5	27.5	28.1
Enfield	29.2	29.0	29.1	28.9
Greenwich	24.7	25.0	27.1	27.1
Harrow	28.4	28.0	28.2	28.1
Havering	27.8	28.1	28.2	28.3
Hillingdon	27.1	25.3	27.6	27.5
Hounslow	27.3	27.9	26.6	26.6
Kingston-upon-Thames	30.2	30.4	28.5	29.0
Merton	27.4	26.7	28.7	28.0
Redbridge	27.4	27.5	30.0	29.6
Richmond-upon-Thames	28.2	28.3	26.4	26.7
Sutton	27.1	26.5	28.6	29.3
Waltham Forest	26.4	26.6	27.4	27.9
South East	27.1	26.9	28.5	28.5
Berkshire	26.4	—	28.6	—
Bracknell Forest	—	26.5	—	28.5
Windsor and Maidenhead	—	25.5	—	27.6
West Berkshire	—	24.0	—	27.9
Reading	—	25.5	—	28.9
Slough	—	27.6	—	28.1
Wokingham	—	26.6	—	29.3
Milton Keynes	27.4	26.6	27.4	28.1
Buckinghamshire	27.3	26.4	29.7	29.5
Brighton and Hove	28.5	28.0	28.9	29.2
East Sussex	27.3	27.5	29.4	29.9
Portsmouth	27.8	27.5	28.1	28.7
Southampton	27.0	27.0	28.8	28.4
Hampshire	28.0	27.8	28.6	28.6
Isle of Wight	25.7	23.8	27.6	28.3
Kent[1]	27.6	—	29.0	—
Kent[2]	—	27.5	—	28.9
Medway	—	28.0	—	28.5
Oxfordshire	26.0	24.8	29.0	29.2
Surrey	26.7	26.9	26.8	27.1
West Sussex	26.1	26.4	27.8	28.2
South West	27.0	26.4	28.9	29.0
Bath and North East Somerset	26.3	26.4	27.3	28.1
City of Bristol	27.4	27.5	28.1	28.0
North Somerset	27.7	27.4	28.9	29.4
South Gloucestershire	28.3	26.7	29.1	29.1
Cornwall	26.3	26.3	29.0	29.5

Key stage 1 and 2 classes, average class size of single teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools. Local Education Authority areas, January 1998 and 1999

	Key Stage 1		Key Stage 2	
	1998	1999 (provisional)	1998	1999 (provisional)
Isles of Scilly	16.3	18.0	20.8	18.4
Devon	26.8	—	29.3	—
Devon	—	24.8	—	28.9
City of Plymouth	—	25.6	—	29.0
Torbay	—	26.9	—	30.2
Bournemouth	29.2	29.2	30.2	29.4
Poole	29.9	30.0	29.9	30.3
Dorset	26.2	25.4	28.9	29.0
Gloucestershire	26.8	26.6	28.3	28.6
Somerset	26.7	26.8	29.1	29.5
Swindon	28.5	28.4	30.2	29.6
Wiltshire	25.8	25.9	28.7	28.8

[1] Before Local Government re-organisation of April 1998.
[2] After Local Government re-organisation of April 1998.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by local education authority *(a)* how many Key Stage One and Key Stage Two pupils in maintained schools were being educated in the same class in January 1999 and *(b)* how many pupils were being educated in mixed year group classes in maintained primary schools in January 1999. [80680]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* Information about the number of Key Stage One and Key Stage Two pupils who are being educated in the same class is not collected centrally. However, the following table shows the number of mixed Key Stage classes in primary schools in January 1999. This will include some mixed Key Stage Two and Key Stage Three classes. The proportion of pupils in mixed year classes has fallen in primary schools from 27 per cent. in 1998 to 26 per cent. in 1999.

Numbers of pupils educated in mixed key stage and mixed year group classes in maintained primary schools by local education authority area in England [1] January 1999 [2]

	Number of pupils in mixed key stage classes [3]	Number of pupils in mixed year group classes [4]
England	82,514	969,460
North East	4,722	51,723
Hartlepool	548	3,267
Middlesbrough	115	2,818
Redcar and Cleveland	261	4,254
Stockton-on-Tees	188	4,072
Darlington	107	1,803
Durham	1,161	14,282
Northumberland	882	7,036
Gateshead	419	4,136
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	490	4,128
North Tyneside	258	1,580
South Tyneside	51	959
Sunderland	242	3,388
North West and Merseyside	9,856	128,915
North West	8,093	112,735
Cheshire	1,371	21,314
Halton	146	3,843
Warrington	498	3,598
Cumbria	1,361	15,130
Bolton	103	3,530
Bury	121	3,012

Numbers of pupils educated in mixed key stage and mixed year group classes in maintained primary schools by local education authority area in England [1] January 1999 [2]

	Number of pupils in mixed key stage classes [3]	Number of pupils in mixed year group classes [4]
Manchester	443	5,660
Oldham	239	4,477
Rochdale	289	4,218
Salford	237	3,918
Stockport	512	4,712
Tameside	294	3,531
Trafford	233	2,777
Wigan	198	3,057
Lancashire	1,985	27,596
Blackburn and Darwen	63	2,082
Blackpool	0	280
Merseyside	1,763	16,180
Knowsley	417	2,656
Liverpool	397	3,725
St. Helens	22	893
Sefton	487	3,060
Wirral	440	5,846
Yorkshire and Humber	8,316	117,745
East Riding of Yorkshire	757	9,371
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	357	6,856
North East Lincolnshire	283	3,013
North Lincolnshire	103	3,025
York	178	4,505
North Yorkshire	2,467	24,627
Barnsley	663	6,111
Doncaster	255	5,275
Rotherham	290	5,065
Sheffield	48	6,043
Bradford	824	7,784
Calderdale	384	6,751
Kirklees	489	9,411
Leeds	686	12,503
Wakefield	532	7,405
East Midlands	9,200	132,270
Derby	82	5,668
Derbyshire	1,085	24,677
Leicester City	661	5,731
Rutland	81	1,446
Leicestershire	1,283	17,498
Lincolnshire	1,707	23,467
Northamptonshire	1,276	16,286
Nottinghamshire	2,139	27,840
City of Nottingham	886	9,657

Numbers of pupils educated in mixed key stage and mixed year group classes in maintained primary schools by local education authority area in England [1] January 1999 [2]

	Number of pupils in mixed key stage classes [3]	Number of pupils in mixed year group classes [4]
West Midlands	7,130	86,431
Herefordshire	517	5,557
Worcestershire	1,109	10,185
Shropshire	1,263	12,608
Telford and Wrekin	168	5,338
Stoke	199	2,726
Staffordshire	1,906	16,022
Warwickshire	873	9,549
Birmingham	528	4,714
Coventry	171	5,974
Dudley	26	2,950
Sandwell	175	3,301
Solihull	62	1,288
Walsall	104	4,209
Wolverhampton	29	2,010
Eastern	11,438	119,498
Luton	80	1,457
Bedfordshire	641	6,756
Cambridgeshire	1,081	17,543
City of Peterborough	305	5,104
Essex	2,693	31,034
Southend	41	1,802
Thurrock	669	4,074
Hertfordshire	1,146	19,326
Norfolk	3,619	17,264
Suffolk	1,163	15,138
Greater London	2,814	47,340
Inner London	1,272	21,258
City of London	0	0
Camden	0	691
Hackney	26	1,627
Hammersmith and Fulham	10	899
Haringey	0	313
Islington	192	1,711
Kensington and Chelsea	29	343
Lambeth	141	2,365
Lewisham	140	1,939
Newham	354	3,011
Southwark	29	3,279
Tower Hamlets	30	2,275
Wandsworth	268	2,255
Westminster	53	550
Outer London	1,542	26,082
Barking and Dagenham	56	749
Barnet	12	1,468
Bexley	73	1,856
Brent	6	1,005
Bromley	58	2,969
Croydon	61	993
Ealing	78	1,336
Enfield	21	1,035
Greenwich	92	3,236
Harrow	55	310
Havering	131	3,525
Hillingdon	85	1,880
Hounslow	31	784
Kingston-upon-Thames	31	493
Merton	263	643
Redbridge	0	843
Richmond-upon-Thames	29	305
Sutton	232	1,207
Waltham Forest	228	1,445
South East	14,485	147,801
Bracknell Forest	89	1,652
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	31	3,556
West Berkshire	442	5,299
Reading	159	4,101
Slough	33	567
Wokingham	389	3,862
Milton Keynes	1,000	3,771
Buckinghamshire	985	6,975
Brighton and Hove	436	1,424
East Sussex	662	10,432
Portsmouth	110	1,232
Southampton	104	1,364
Hampshire	2,130	24,000
Isle of Wight	381	1,990
Kent	2,482	28,270
Medway	204	2,876
Oxfordshire	1,946	21,936
Surrey	906	10,197
West Sussex	1,996	14,297
South West	14,553	137,737
Bath and North East Somerset	340	3,482
City of Bristol	196	6,996
North Somerset	179	5,093
South Gloucestershire	518	6,737
Cornwall	2,400	16,994
Isles of Scilly	10	156
Devon	2,803	23,013
City of Plymouth	496	6,193
Torbay	85	1,937
Bournemouth	0	259
Poole	0	269
Dorset	689	7,351
Gloucestershire	2,147	18,422
Somerset	2,188	16,241
Swindon	526	4,901
Wiltshire	1,976	19,693

[1] Classes as taught during a single selected period in each school on the day of the census in January.

[2] Provisional

[3] Includes a small number of pupils in mixed key stage 2 and 3 classes.

[4] Includes pupils in mixed classes of reception age to year group 7.

Rainsford School, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *951*, on Rainsford School, Chelmsford, when he expects to reach a decision on the appeal from Rainsford School, Chelmsford against the direction made by Essex County Council to admit a pupil, whose name has been sent to him, to that school. [81069]

Ms Estelle Morris: We asked Essex Local Education Authority to provide details on this pupil and their handling of the direction process, along with full information about alternative local schools, by Monday 15 March. The information requested was necessarily full and complex, and Essex LEA were not in a position to respond before Monday 12 April. Officials are now giving urgent consideration to the material provided to enable my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make a decision as soon as possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what guidance he has given to the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals on those sections of the Agriculture Committee's Fifth report of Session 1997–98 (HC 753) on Vitamin B6 which deal with the distinction between good and bad science; [80637]

(2) what guidance he has given to the Ad Hoc Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals on those sections of the Agriculture Committee's Fifth report of Session 1997–98 (HC 753) on Vitamin B6 which deal with the use of inappropriate safety factors when assessing supplement safety. [80622]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South East (Dr. Iddon) on 15 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *320.*

Government-funded Research

Ms Drown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much the Government spent in 1998–99 on research into *(a)* organic farming and *(b)* biotechnology. [80791]

Mr. Rooker: In 1998–99 the Government spent *(a)* £1.7 million on research into organic farming and *(b)* £52 million on agricultural biotechnology research. "Biotechnology" is defined by Government as the use of biological organisms, systems and processes to manufacturing and service industries.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the proposed Meat Hygiene Service charges; which organisations have expressed concern about their impact; and if he will make a statement. [81366]

Mr. Rooker: I have received a great many representations from within and outside of the meat industry on the proposed level of Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) charges for 1999–2000. The level of MHS charges to apply in 1999–2000 for hygiene/welfare inspection and for the enforcement of Specified Risk Material controls has yet to be decided. Ministers are still carefully considering proposals made by the MHS to ensure that they are fully cost justified. They will then be subject to full consultation with all plant operators. The results of the consultation will be reported back to Ministers who will then take final decisions on the level of rates to apply and their operative date.

Suckler Cow Quota

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria are used to award suckler cow quota to *(a)* new entrants to suckler production, *(b)* existing producers wanting extra quota and *(c)* dairy farmers seeking to convert to suckler production; and what rules exist regarding minimum and maximum amounts which may be awarded. [81373]

Mr. Rooker: Producers who meet strictly defined criteria may apply to the appropriate category of the Suckler Cow Quota national reserve for a quota allocation. Some of the categories cover new entrants and other existing producers wanting extra quota. There is no category which specifically covers dairy farmers seeking to convert to suckler production, although such producers may qualify under a category for first-time claimants. In addition, both new and existing producers are free to buy or lease quota from other producers.

The maximum amount of quota which may be allocated varies depending on the category applied to, the circumstances of the applicant and the availability of quota in the reserve. There are no rules governing the minimum amounts which may be allocated to a producer, but it is not possible to allocate less than 0.1 of a quota.

Further information is contained in the documents "Explanatory Guide to Suckler Cow Premium Scheme Quotas" and "Application for Quota from the National Reserve" which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Minister for Science

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which companies the Minister for Science has met *(a)* in his Department and *(b)* elsewhere since becoming a Minister to discuss genetically modified foods. [70440]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 February 1999]:* In his capacity as Science Minister my noble Friend has met many companies inside and outside the Department. None of these meetings has specifically discussed genetically modified food policy.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if the Minister for Science has left the room on each occasion that genetically modified foods and crops have been discussed at meetings since his appointment; [73127]

(2) how many meetings the Minister for Science has attended where genetically modified foods and crops were discussed; on what dates; and if he will list those who attended these meetings; [73135]

(3) if the Minister for Science is permitted to take part in discussions on genetically modified foods and crops; [73128]

(4) what discussions on genetically modified foods or crops the Minister for Science has been involved in since taking office; [74220]

(5) if the Minister for Science participates in *(a)* decisions on genetically modified food policy, *(b)* discussions on genetically modified food policy, *(c)* discussions on genetically modified crop policy, *(d)* discussions on policy relating to genetically modified crops, *(e)* promotion of or support for British companies involved in genetically modified food or genetically modified crops, *(f)* decisions on Government biotechnology policy as it relates to agriculture and *(g)* discussions on Government biotechnology policy as it relates to agriculture. [74236]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the statements made by my noble Friend Lord Sainsbury on 31 July 1998 and 16 February 1999, copies of which I have placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will place the itinerary for the Minister for Science's visit to China and Korea in the Library; if he will list the (i) universities, (ii) scientific institutions, (iii) laboratories and (iv) companies which he visited; and what was the cost of the visit. [73021]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* My Noble Friend Lord Sainsbury visited Korea from 12–16 September 1998 and China from 16–18 September. The cost of his visit was £6,570.

In Korea, Lord Sainsbury co-chaired the Third UK-Korea Science and Technology Round-table with Minister Kang of the Ministry of Science and Technology. He held discussions with Minister Bae of the Ministry for Information and Communications and also with Kim Tae-dong the Presidential Secretary for Policy and Planning and with Chung Se-yung, Honorary Chairman of Hyundai Motors. In addition, Lord Sainsbury opened a seminar on Technology Transfer and Innovation in UK industry, attended the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and the Korean Institute of Bioscience and Biotechnology, and made visits to the LG Corporate Institute of Technology, the Samsung Advanced Institute of Technology and to Yonsei University.

In China, Lord Sainsbury held discussions and signed a new Protocol on Scientific and Technological co-operation between the UK and China with Vice Minister Xu Guanhua of the Ministry of Science and Technology. He also signed a DTI/MOFTEC Memorandum of Understanding on Cleaner Coal Technology Research and Development with Vice Minister Long Yongtu and attended the signing of a co-operation agreement between the Institute of Electrical Engineers and the Chinese Mechanical Engineers Society. In addition, Lord Sainsbury spoke at a China-UK Technology Foresight Colloqium and at a seminar at Tsinghua University to launch co-operation on micro-satellites between the Surrey and Tsinghua Universities. He opened a Renewable Energy Seminar sponsored by DTI and the State Economic and Trade Commission; and launched the Sino-British Science and Technology Festival in the presence of Vice Minister Xu.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions since becoming a Minister, the Minister for Science has in his official capacity met *(a)* Judith Portrait and *(b)* Christopher Skie. [74222]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* None.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times the Minister for Science has met Mr. Christopher Stone, Director of Floranova, Innotech Investments and Gatsby Plant Science Innovations Ltd., since becoming a Minister. [75708]

Mr. Byers: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave on 18 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *712*.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if any company, foundation or trust with which Lord Sainsbury is, or has formerly been, associated is planning to be involved in the commercial exploiting of genome research. [76076]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* All Lord Sainsbury's commercial interests were placed in the blind trust established when he was appointed as Minister for Science.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements Lord Sainsbury has made to insulate himself from his former interests in the Gatsby Foundation. [76074]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* My noble Friend Lord Sainsbury has no financial interest in the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, which is a registered charity. He wrote to the trustees on 31 July asking them not to divulge to him any information about the Foundation's investments while he is in Government. He has chosen to take no part in the Foundation's grant decisions in this period.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Lord Sainsbury participates in discussions in the Cabinet Committee on Biotechnology in respect of the Human Genome Project. [76073]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* He does.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Minister for Science discussed biotechnology issues with Mr. Christopher Stone in his capacity as a board member of the Gatsby Trust. [78590]

Mr. Byers: No such discussions have taken place.

BBSRC Grants

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much grant in 1998–99 was given by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council to *(a)* the John Innes Centre and *(b)* the Sainsbury Laboratory. [73037]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* DTI Ministers routinely respond to questions concerning the use of Science Budget money and the conduct of the Research Councils, but this Government, like their predecessors, support the Haldane principle that

> "day-to-day decisions on the scientific merits of different strategies, programmes and projects should be taken by the Research Councils, without Government involvement"

(Paragraph 3.23 of the 1993 White Paper, "Realising Our Potential: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology").

Accordingly, it is the BBSRC itself which decides the allocation of competitive strategic grant (CSG) to each of its eight Institutes, including the John Innes Centre. The Institutes are also able to apply for certain categories of BBSRC research grants, in competition with other researchers and subject to the approval of the Council's peer review committees. The Council does not allocate CSG to the Sainsbury Laboratory. The Laboratory is administered by the University of East Anglia and its staff are University employees. They are eligible to apply for research grants in the same way as academics elsewhere.

The table shows, for each year since 1996–297, the CSG approved by the Council for the John Innes Centre (including expenditure on equipment and minor works), and expenditure on research grants to the John Innes Centre and the Sainsbury Laboratory respectively, as approved by the BBSRC's peer review committees.

	Expenditure (£ millions)		
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
John Innes Centre			
(a) CSG	10.19	10.25	10.50
(b) research grants	2.41	2.55	2.21
(c) total	12.60	12.80	12.71
Sainsbury Laboratory (research grants)	0.28	0.51	0.64

Food and Crop Biotechnology (Genetic Modification)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the Government differentiate between genetically modified food and genetically modified crop biotechnology in determining departmental responsibilities. [74221]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* The responsibility for agriculture and food issues—including those relating to genetically modified crops and foods—rests primarily with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Other Government Departments also have a role. For example, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has primary responsibility for protection of the environment, and is therefore responsible for ensuring the safety of the release of genetically modified organisms—including genetically modified crops—into the environment. In this respect, DETR/MAFF act jointly on GM crop applications, with DETR taking the lead. Similarly, given the Department of Health's primary responsibility for human health, it acts jointly with MAFF on genetically modified food applications, with MAFF taking the lead.

The Office of Science and Technology seeks to ensure that there is effective co-ordination between Government Departments, and that the Government are receiving the best scientific advice.

Human Genetics

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if it is his policy that members of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission should avoid conflicts of interest. [79532]

Mr. Battle: It is important that advice is sought from those people best placed to provide it. The members of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission, therefore, have a range of backgrounds, experience, and interests. As with members of any public body, they are required to declare any personal or business interest which may influence their judgment and should follow all the appropriate guidance whenever a conflict arises.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 18 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 716, where the declarations of interest of members of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority and the Human Genetics Advisory Commission are available for public inspection. [79506]

Mr. Battle: I understand that a list is maintained at the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority at Paxton House, 30 Artillery Lane, London E1 7LS (Tel: 0171–377 5077). For the Human Genetics Advisory Commission a list is maintained by the secretariat at the Office of Science and Technology, Albany House, 94–98 Petty France, London SW1H 9ST (Tel: 0171–271 2131). I understand that both bodies intend to publish the list in their forthcoming Annual Reports.

Wellcome Trust

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to reduce uncertainty among scientists about the rules for submission and resubmission of applications for the Wellcome Trust funds from the Joint Infrastructure Fund. [80162]

Mr. Battle: Comprehensive information and details of how to submit applications to the Joint Infrastructure Fund are available from the Wellcome Trust in respect of the biomedical and biological sciences, and the relevant Research Councils in respect of all other areas of science and engineering. Any specific inquiries which universities may have about the Fund should be directed to them.

The Trust and Research Councils will accept submissions at any time up to a final deadline of 30 April 2000 for new buildings and refurbishment and 10 October 2000 for applications for equipment. Resubmissions are allowed only if expressly invited by the Joint Executive Committee of the Joint Infrastructure Fund, but this would be only under the most exceptional circumstances and is expected to be a very rare occurrence.

European Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will produce an updated explanatory memorandum for the European Scrutiny Committee in relation to the draft End of Life Vehicles Directive. [80540]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* As the hon. Member is aware, the Environment Council meeting on 11 March decided to defer a final decision on the Directive until its next meeting on 24–25 June. No new issues have been raised which would merit an updated Explanatory Memorandum or Regulatory Impact Assessment. However, if an official text should emerge in the meantime, this will of course be deposited in Parliament and covered by an Explanatory Memorandum in the normal way.

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the individuals

seconded from his Department to the oil and gas companies or firms contracting for oil and gas companies since 1 May 1997. [80849]

Mr. Battle: Four secondments from my Department to companies in the oil and gas sector have commenced since 1 May 1997. They are:

Individual	*Company to which they are seconded*	*DTI directorate from which they are seconded*
Helen Hichens	Mobile North Sea Ltd.	Oil and Gas Directorate
Christopher Pook	BG plc	Ministerial Parliamentary Support Team
Anne Sherriff	BP Exploration	Finance and Resource Management
Ashley Malster	BG plc	Reform of Energy Regulation Team

My Department does not have details of the specific companies with which those in the oil and gas sector have current contracts.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the individuals seconded to his Department from the oil and gas industry since 1 May 1997. [80848]

Mr. Battle: Four secondments into this Department from the oil and gas industry have commenced since 1 May 1997. They are:

Individual	*Seconding company*	*DTI directorate to which they are seconded*
Dominic McClafferty	European Gas Turbines (GEC Alstrom)	Export Promotion Directorate
Scott Hornafius	Mobil	Oil and Gas Directorate
Philip Haymes	British Petroleum	Export Promotion Directorate
Neil McMillan	Brown and Root AOC	Infrastructure and Energy Projects Directorate

Raw Milk (MMC Report)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *94*, when he will publish the MMC report on the supply of raw milk. [81109]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will publish the report as soon as is practicable.

MOX Fuel Shipment

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much extra training the armed United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority police who will accompany the shipment of MOX fuel from Barrow to Japan have been given; when this extra training was undertaken; what the cost was of the extra training; and if he will make a statement. [81080]

Mr. Battle: Officers of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary have been given comprehensive training, taking full account of their roles and responsibilities when escorting shipments of MOX fuel. The training package, including provision for regular refresher courses, was specially developed by the Constabulary and the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency and delivered under commercial contracts during the past year. Other specialist training has been carried out by the Northumbria Constabulary. Some officers have also completed advanced first aid courses. The costs of the training are a matter for the companies concerned.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many armed United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority Police will accompany each shipment of MOX fuel from Barrow to Japan; what weapons they will be armed with; when the first shipment is expected to leave Barrow; and if other countries will be informed in advance of the movements of these shipments through their jurisdictions. [81079]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 18 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *364–65*.

For obvious security reasons details of physical protection arrangements for ships carrying MOX fuel are confidential. The timing of the first shipment is not yet finalised but the intention is to carry it out this calendar year. It has been our practice to inform coastal states, both on and off route, in advance and on a confidential basis, of the movement of High Level Waste shipments. In the case of MOX fuel shipments, we intend to continue this practice, consistent with our international obligations to protect information about the movement of sensitive nuclear materials.

Carers (Minimum Wage)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to introduce a minimum wage for carers. [80766]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Carers aged 18 or over, who are workers, are already covered by the national minimum wage.

Consumer Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the outcome of the Consumer Affairs Council held in Brussels on 13 April; and if he will make a statement. [80762]

Dr. Howells: The Council unanimously adopted a Resolution welcoming the European Commission Consumer Policy Action Plan for 1999–2001. In an exchange of views on the Action Plan there was welcome for it and the importance it placed on integrating consumer concerns into other Community policies, in accordance with the Amsterdam Treaty.

During the orientation debate on the proposed Directive on the Distance Marketing of Financial Services, member states agreed on the need for a Directive, but there were differences as to its contents.

Spain called for action at Community level to restrict or ban the sale and marketing of videos and toys which encourage violent behaviour.

The Netherlands suggested that the Community should consider the implications for consumers of the millennium bug.

Science Enterprise Challenge

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the centres of enterprise to be endowed under the science enterprise challenge scheme. [80813]

Mr. Battle: The Science Enterprise Challenge competition is still in progress so it is not possible to list the centres at this point. The competition is in two stages. Stage 1 bids were due in on 14 April and the finalists to go onto stage 2 will be announced on 10 May. The winners will be announced this summer.

University Challenge

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the bids for the £50 million university challenge scheme referred to in paragraph 3.59 of the Red Book. [80814]

Mr. Battle: The 15 winners of the £45 million University Challenge competition, run jointly by Government, Wellcome Trust and the Gatsby Foundation, were announced on 10 March 1999. They are:

University	*£ million*
University of Leeds/University of Sheffield/University of York (White Rose Consortium)	4.5
University of Manchester/UMIST	4.5
University of Bath/University of Bristol	3.75
University of Birmingham/University of Warwick	3
University of Cambridge/The Babraham Institute	3
University of Cardiff/University of Wales College of Medicine	3
Imperial College, London	3
King's College London/Queen Mary and Westfield College London	3
London Business School/King's College London/Queen Mary and Westfield College/University College London	3
University of Oxford	3
University of Strathclyde/University of Glasgow	3
University College London/Institute of Cancer Research/Cancer Research Campaign Technologies Ltd./School of Pharmacy London/Imperial Cancer Research Fund/Royal Veterinary College	3
University of Edinburgh/The Moredun Foundation/The Roslin Biotechnology Centre/The UK Astronomy Technology Centre of PPARC/Edinburgh Station of the British Geological Survey	2.25
Queen's University Belfast/University of Ulster	2
University of Aberystwyth/The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER)	1

It is inappropriate to publish a list of all the original 45 bids as they were provided in confidence.

Local Support Centres

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what budget has been allocated to local support centres for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [81062]

Mr. Wills: The budgets allocated to the Department's Information Society Initiative Local Support Centres for the requested financial years are:

Year	*£ million*
1997–98[1]	2.77
1998–99[1]	2.00
1999–2000[2]	3.00

[1] Actual Spend
[2] Forecast

Commercial Debt (Late Payment)

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to make representations to the European Community on standardising late payment of commercial debt regulations across the Community. [81057]

Mr. Wills: The Government are working closely with their EU partners to tackle late payment at a European level so that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can be sure of their rights wherever they do business in the EU and participate fully in the Single Market. We are actively involved in discussions on the proposed EU directive on combating late payment in commercial transactions which, we believe, should complement our own late payment legislation.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those areas for which extension of the Working Time Directive is currently scheduled for discussion at the European Council; for which a qualified majority of member states have already declared their support. [81227]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Negotiations on the extension of the Working Time Directive to those sectors which are currently excluded are continuing at working group level, and are not due to be discussed at the European Council. The agenda for the next Social Affairs Council meeting, which is due to take place on 25 May, has not yet been agreed.

Depleted Uranium

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what sites in the United Kingdom are licensed for storing depleted uranium. [81232]

Mr. Battle: A licence under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 is not required for the storage of depleted uranium as it constitutes "excepted matter" under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 (as amended), s26(1). However, material is stored at a number of nuclear licensed sites. Depleted uranium is used at a number of Ministry of Defence sites and by civil industrial operators who are registered by the Environment Agencies

(Environment Agency for England and Wales, SEPA for Scotland and the Environment and Heritage Service which is an executive agency for the DoE in Northern Ireland) under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993.

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what safety standards exist for the storage of depleted uranium. [81231]

Mr. Battle: The Health and Safety Executive regulates the storage of depleted uranium under the general provisions of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the specific requirements of the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985 (SI 1985/1333). The Environment Agencies in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have responsibilities in respect of the Radioactive Substances Act 1993.

Arms Brokers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps he has taken to establish a national register of arms brokers; [81100]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the number of arms brokers operating in the United Kingdom. [81099]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The Government considered the establishment of a register of arms dealers whilst developing proposals contained in the White Paper on Strategic Export Controls, but felt that it would be better to focus on the need to control specific trafficking and brokering activities. However, this issue was raised in response to the White Paper and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) told my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Ms Jones) on 14 December 1998, *Official Report*, column *364*, we are reviewing all the proposals contained in the White Paper in the light of the responses received.

The Department of Trade and Industry has made no estimate of the number of arms brokers operating in the United Kingdom.

Strategic Exports

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of current *(a)* German and *(b)* US licensing requirements for arms brokers; and if he will introduce similar licensing requirements for arms brokers in his proposed legislation on strategic exports. [81172]

Dr. Howells: In their White Paper on Strategic Export Controls, the Government set out their proposals for new controls on trafficking and brokering. All the proposals contained in the White Paper are currently being reviewed in the light of the responses to it. Both in the course of drawing up the proposals and during our review, we have examined, where it is relevant to do so, the legislation and practice in other countries, including the US and Germany.

Scottish Power

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce his decision on Scottish Power's application to construct and operate an open cycle gas turbine generating station at Holybourne, Hampshire. [81487]

Mr. Battle: I have today decided to give a direction under Section 14(3) of the Energy Act 1976 to prevent the building of a 160 MW generating station to be fuelled by natural gas at the Holybourne Oil Terminal, Alton, Hampshire.

Copies of the Press Notice and decision letter are being placed in the Library of the House.

Export Controls

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if *(a)* tear gas and *(b)* plastic bullets are covered by the export control regime. [81273]

Dr. Howells: These goods, and others, are controlled under entries in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended: tear gas under entry ML7; and plastic bullets under entries ML3 or PL5021.

However, a variety of devices may contain tear gas. Such devices are controlled under several other entries: for instance, portable anti-riot devices for administering an incapacitating substance under PL5001; grenades under ML4 or PL5030; ammunition under ML3 or PL5021; gas projectors or generators under ML2 or PL5018; under entries ML6, ML9, or ML10, gas projecting equipment for controlled ground vehicles, combatant vessels or aircraft, respectively, which are specially designed or modified for military use; and portable devices designed for self-protection by the administration of an incapacitating substance under entry 1A905 of the Dual-Use and Related Goods (Export Control) Regulation 1996, as amended.

It should be noted that other goods are also controlled under each of these entries.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disabled People (Benefits)

13. **Mr. Singh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to improve the living standards of the poorest disabled people. [79740]

Mr. Darling: Our proposals for a new Disability Income Guarantee together with measures in the Welfare Reform Bill will provide more help for disabled adults and children who need help most.

36. **Mr. Peter Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the steps he has taken to remove obstacles within the benefits system to people with disabilities who wish to train for, seek or undertake employment. [79764]

Mr. Bayley: We are removing barriers to work from the benefit system. We introduced a new 12 months linking rule for incapacity benefits last year, which removes the risk of losing money for people on benefits who want to try work.

We are also piloting, for a year, from 11 April 1999, a package of four measures in 15 areas to help people with disabilities, who want to return to work. The pilots will allow those on incapacity benefits to earn a small amount of money (up to £15) without losing benefit; and to test out a job for a trial period whilst remaining on benefit. The pilots will also allow access to a Jobmatch payment of £50 a week for people moving into part-time work; and a Jobfinder's Grant of £200 for those starting work.

All-work Test

15. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his proposals to reform the all-work test. [79742]

Mr. Bayley: There is a provision in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill to replace the All-work Test with the Personal Capability Assessment. We intend that, as well as determining entitlement to benefit, the Personal Capability Assessment will provide constructive information about what a person's medical condition or disability would allow them to do and advice on practical measures which might improve their chances of returning to work. This will enable personal advisers to help people identify and overcome the barriers they face and take steps back into employment.

30. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals are pending against refusal of benefit due to a failure to satisfy the all-work test; and if he will make a statement. [79758]

Mr. Bayley: As of 31 October 1998, there were 40,198 all-work test appeals pending in Great Britain.

New, streamlined arrangements for handling disputes and appeals are being introduced later this year under the powers in the Social Security Act 1998. These changes form an early part of the Government's long-term plan to modernise the social security system.

Note:

Figures include all cases lodged before 31 October 1998 and still awaiting a decision.

Source:

100 per cent. extract from Independent Tribunals Service computer.

Medical Examiners

18. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to modify the role of medical examiners in benefit applications. [79746]

Mr. Bayley: We will be making minor changes to the role that examining doctors play in deciding entitlement to disablement benefits during the course of the year as part of our plans to modernise the decision making system. For all benefits where entitlement depends on a medical question, the examining doctor will act in an advisory capacity to the decision maker, providing expert medical advice to enable them to reach a correct decision on benefit entitlement. The aim will be to improve the quality of the decision and the level of information which we give to benefit claimants.

Fraud

23. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to minimise fraud in the administration of housing benefit. [79751]

Mr. Timms: "Safeguarding Social Security", published last month, makes it clear that we want a benefit system which is secure from start to finish. This Government are committed to taking tough action against housing benefit fraud. We have already reformed the anti-fraud financial incentive scheme for local authorities to ensure they continue to be rewarded for detecting cases of genuine benefit fraud and cases where they identify that a claimant is no longer resident at an address. An additional £100 million will be made available to local authorities over the next three years to encourage them to adopt the Verification Framework. Through a series of additional checks, carried out throughout the life of a benefit claim, the Verification Framework will help to secure the administration of housing benefit. The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate is continuing to carry out a rolling programme of visits to local authorities. This will also play a key role in driving up standards of administration and security.

To secure the payment of housing benefit from the outset of a claim all local authorities have been invited to participate in the Royal Mail "do not redirect" initiative. This initiative prevents benefit claimants from using Royal Mail's postal redirection arrangements to make false claims to benefit from multiple addresses. To further streamline the administration of housing benefit, over £3 million has been made available this year to install computer terminals in local authorities which provide access to the Department's benefit systems. We are now looking to extend this initiative to include exchanging information electronically between local authorities and the Department, providing further scope to prevent fraud and error occurring in the first place.

26. **Mr. Stringer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes to procedures he proposes to safeguard the benefits system against fraud. [79754]

Mr. Timms: We are improving procedures and processes across the board to get claims right from the outset and then keep them right to reduce losses from fraud and error. It is vital that we secure the gateway to the benefit system. The initial step of checking a claim requires careful scrutiny of the evidence that must be provided by a claimant before payment is made. We have already tightened the gateway to Income Support and saved £200 million in 1998–99 alone.

31. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his plans to train and support staff to tackle fraud in the benefit system. [79759]

Mr. Timms: The Department is committed to training and developing all staff to deliver their jobs more effectively, in line with the principles of Investors in People. This commitment applies equally to our staff who tackle fraud in the benefit systems, and who through their administrative duties help in our prevention of fraud.

In October 1997 the gateway to Income Support was substantially strengthened by introducing more checks at points of known weakness. Staff were given over 200,000 hours of extra training on the new rules and this was supported by drawing together into a single code more than 450 separate instructions on how to check and process Income Support claims.

The Benefits Agency (BA) provides extensive training for counter fraud staff ranging from standard interviewing techniques through to specialist training in the law, surveillance and case preparation for the courts. In June 1997 we set up a joint development initiative between the BA and Local Authorities to establish commonality across a range of standards and training issues. In particular the Professionalism In Security (PINS) project is seeking to introduce a new package of accredited training that will lead to the award of a professional qualification in fraud investigation and will be recognised by both central and local government.

A foundation level training syllabus has now been finalised and contracts have been awarded for training to improve the professionalism of investigators and thereby to raise the status and profile of this group. In addition, over 50 students are already studying for Security Management certificates, diplomas and degrees offered by the University of Leicester.

Research and development work into an advanced level syllabus, a code of conduct, a code of good practice, a security management framework and centres of excellence is on-going.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the report of the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate into Area Directorate 3 of the Benefits Agency, with particular reference to *(a)* improving staff compliance with operating procedures and *(b)* encouraging co-operation between the Agency and local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [81112]

Mr. Timms: The fraud strategy paper published on 29 March, "A New Contract for Welfare: Safeguarding Social Security", highlights the weaknesses of the system that we inherited. The paper also sets out our strategy for dealing with those weaknesses, many of which have been highlighted in the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's report.

The Benefits Agency is committed to improving standards and, in response to the issues raised in the BFI report, has produced a robust and detailed action plan which was published in the report. It has already taken a number of steps to improve staff compliance to administrative procedures and counter-fraud work. This action plan, together with an annual plan for the Area Directorate 3, will be reviewed regularly and rigorously to check that standards are achieved.

By working in partnership, councils and the Benefits Agency can fight fraud more effectively, as well as giving better service to the public. That is why we have earmarked funding in each Benefits Agency area to develop stronger links with local councils. Liaison between the BA and the local authorities is governed by Service Level Agreements (SLAs) at local level, based on national models. All SLAs have been revised recently and cover core activities on benefit administration and fraud and give each party a clear statement of how co-operation should work in practice.

Childhood Poverty

27. **Ms Keeble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to tackle the problem of children growing up in poverty. [79755]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) earlier today, *Official Report*, column 567.

Child Care Costs

32. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to assist parents seeking work with the costs of child care. [79760]

Angela Eagle: Parents need access to affordable, good quality child care to help balance work and family life successfully. We have already increased the help available for child care costs in the in-work benefits and the Government have introduced the Tax Credits Bill, which provides for a much more generous child care tax credit.

Pensions

33. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he has taken to monitor the mechanism by which the relative level of the state pension and associated benefits are calculated for *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples. [79761]

Mr. Timms: The rate of Category B retirement pension (the "married woman's pension") has been set at about 60 per cent. of Category A retirement pension since it was introduced. We have no plans to change this.

Widows (Benefits)

34. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of widows who will suffer a reduction in their SERPS entitlement from April. [79762]

Mr. Timms: Information in the exact form requested is not available. The table provides forecast information on the average number of widows who could be affected at any one time in each year of the next 10 years. It should be noted that some of these people may have no SERPS entitlement and, therefore, will not be affected by the change.

	Potential number of widows affected (Thousand)
1999–2000	15
2000–01	50
2001–02	90
2002–03	130
2003–04	175
2004–05	225
2005–06	275
2006–07	330
2007–08	390
2008–09	450
2009–10	515

Notes:
1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 5,000.
2. The proposed new schemes for widows and widowers under state pension age have not been taken into account, nor have the half rate inheritance changes beginning in April 2000.
3. Figures are for GB only.

Source:
Government Actuary's Department

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements are being made to ensure that widows who have lost bereavement tax credit receive comparable benefits. [79750]

Angela Eagle: No one who already has the Widow's Bereavement Tax allowance will lose it. Anyone who claims the allowance before 5 April 2000 will receive it in the normal way—for the tax year they claim and the following year.

In the future, widows and widowers who are under pension age will be able to claim the new bereavement benefits, which will include the Bereavement Payment—a tax free lump sum of £2,000 payable to widows and widowers. This is double the amount of the current lump sum, Widow's Payment.

Welfare Reform

35. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what way the Government have taken into account the views of respondents to the consultation on the Green Paper on Welfare Reform. [79763]

Mr. Timms: Responses are assessed as individual policy areas are developed and announcements made.

Retirement Pensioners

37. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest estimate of the numbers of retirement pensioners; and what estimate has been made of the number in 10 years' time. [79765]

Mr. Timms: For 1998–99, the estimated average number of pensioners is 10.7 million. The average for 2008–09 is 12 million.

Notes:

1. The estimates are for Great Britain and overseas.
2. The estimates exclude those receiving only Graduated Retirement Benefit.

Source:

1. Pensions Strategy Computer System.
2. Government Actuary's Department.

Lone Parents

38. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce incentives to assist lone parents into employment. [79766]

Angela Eagle: The Government have introduced a number of measures to give all lone parents the opportunity to work.

In the Budget we announced plans to increase the support available to lone parents going into work. From this October, those getting Income Support will continue to receive that benefit for two weeks when they start work and claim Working Families Tax Credit. This will give real help with meeting expenses, including child care costs, in the period up to the first payday. At present, concerns about such expenses can deter lone parents from making the move into work.

The National Minimum Wage and the Working Families Tax Credit will help ensure that work pays for lone parents. We are also helping lone parents overcome the barriers they face in moving into work through the New Deal for Lone Parents and the National Childcare Strategy.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which categories of disability living allowance recipients are exempt from the review process which replaces the benefit integrity project. [79734]

Mr. Darling: At the outset, certain groups of disabled people will not be contacted as part of the new periodic inquiry process. These include anyone whose case has been examined by the Benefit Integrity Project; anyone excluded from the activity of the Benefit Integrity Project; anyone with a fixed period award of DLA due to expire within the next three years, and anyone who is treated as being terminally ill within the Department's definition.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list for *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* each region of England, the number of disabled people who have been awarded disability living allowance since 1 June 1997 (i) on their initial application, (ii) at review and (iii) at appeal; [80938]

(2) if he will list for *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland, *(d)* England and *(e)* the United Kingdom, the number of people who applied (i) successfully and (ii) unsuccessfully in the last year for disability living allowance. [80940]

Mr. Bayley: The administration of Social Security benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Mark Oaten, dated 16 April 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking if he will list for, (a) Wales, (b) Scotland, (c) Northern Ireland, and (d) each region of England, the number of disabled people who have been awarded disability living allowance since 1 June 1997, (i) on their initial application, (ii) at review and, (iii) at appeal, and if he will list for (a) Wales, (b) Scotland, (c) Northern Ireland, (d) England, and (e) the United Kingdom, the number of people who applied, (i) successfully, and (ii) unsuccessfully, in the last year for disability living allowance.

The information you have requested is in the attached tables.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Number of disability living allowance awards made on initial application, review, and appeal, in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Region	*On initial application*	*At review*	*At appeal*
England			
North East	19,900	3,180	2,240
Yorks and Humberside	29,600	5,660	2,640
East Midlands	26,460	3,920	1,040
Eastern	25,580	3,520	1,280
London	36,900	5,900	2,540
South East	29,240	4,740	1,780
South West	24,120	3,200	1,300
West Midlands	34,180	4,620	1,180
North West	45,180	9,860	4,900
Wales	24,720	4,180	1,420
Scotland	31,740	7,680	4,840
Northern Ireland	22,395	7,044	1,318

Figures are for the period 1 June 1997 to 28 February 1999
Figures for England Scotland and Wales are estimates by Analytical Services Division based on a 5 per cent. sample
Figures for Northern Ireland (NI) based on 100 per cent. data and provided by DHSS (NI)
The Regions of England are Government Office Regions

Applications for Disability Living Allowance in 1998

	Successful application	*Unsuccessful application*
England	148,428	169,872
Wales	13,029	16,333
Scotland	17,345	26,576
Northern Ireland	12,492	9,359
United Kingdom	191,294	222,140

Figures for England Scotland and Wales provided by Analytical Services Division based on 100 per cent. data
Figures for Northern Ireland (NI) based on 100 per cent. data and provided by DHSS (NI)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland, *(d)* England and *(e)* the United Kingdom, the number of people whose main disabling condition is deafness (i) who were awarded disability living allowance since 1 June 1997 (1) on their initial application, (2) at review and (3) at appeal, and (ii) who applied (x) successfully and (y) unsuccessfully in the last year for disability living allowance. [80939]

Mr. Bayley: The administration of Social Security benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Mark Oaten, dated 16 April 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question regarding the number of people whose main disabling condition is deafening (i) who were awarded Disability Living Allowance since 1 June 1997 (1) on their initial application, (2) at review, and (3) at appeal, and (ii) who applied (x) successfully and (y) unsuccessfully in the last year for Disability Living Allowance for (a) Wales, (b) Scotland, (c) Northern Ireland, (d) England, and (e) the United Kingdom.

The information that is available is included in the attached tables. Unfortunately the information about the number of people, for whom the main disabling condition is deafness, and unsuccessfully claimed Disability Living Allowance in the last year, is unavailable.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

People awarded Disability Living Allowance on initial application, review, and appeal since 1 June 1997—main disabling condition deafness

	Initial Application	*Review*	*Appeal*
England	3,300	1,540	1,520
Wales	260	100	40
Scotland	120	140	160
Northern Ireland	221	51	15
United Kingdom	3,901	1,831	1,735

Notes:
Figures relate to the period 1 June 1997 to 28 February 1998
Figures for England Scotland and Wales are estimates by Analytical Services Division based on a 5 per cent. sample
Figures for Norther Ireland (NI) based on 100 per cent. data and provided by DHSS (NI)

People awarded Disability Living Allowance in 1998—main disabling condition is deafness

Area	
England	1,900
Wales	180
Scotland	80
Northern Ireland	126
United Kingdom	2,286

Notes:
Figures relate to awards on initial application
Figures relate to the twelve months ending 30 November 1998
Figures for England Scotland and Wales are estimates by Analytical Services Division based on a 5 per cent. sample
Figures for Northern Ireland (NI) based on 100 per cent. data and provided by DHSS (NI)

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79621]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer from the Under-Secretary of State for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), on 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column 66.

Bereavement Benefits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 19 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *838–39*, on bereavement benefits, if he will estimate the ranges of income from occupational pensions being received by the widows in receipt of such pensions. [80599]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 April 1999]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Amount of occupational pension received by widows in Great Britain in 1996–97

Thousand

Amount of occupational pension received	*Number*
No occupational pension	1,450
£0-£10	180
£10-£20	260
£20-£30	180
£30-£40	140
£40-£50	100
£50 or more	80
Total	2,780

The information provided in my Written Answer on 19 March 1999, *Official Report*, at columns 838–39 included information on widowers. The analysis reproduced related only to widows.

Number and proportion of widows in receipt of occupational pension by Government Office Region/Home Nation (1996–97)

	Number of widows (Thousand)			*Percentage of widows*		
Government Office Regions (exc. NI)	*In receipt of occupational pension*	*Not in receipt of occupational pension*	*Total*	*In receipt of occupational pension*	*Not in receipt of occupational pension*	*Total*
North East	70	70	140	50	50	100
North West and Merseyside	150	200	340	42	58	100
Yorkshire and the Humber	150	140	290	52	48	100
East Midlands	90	100	180	48	52	100
West Midlands	120	130	260	47	53	100
Eastern	110	130	240	47	53	100

Number and proportion of widows in receipt of occupational pension by Government Office Region/Home Nation (1996–97)

Government Office Regions (exc. NI)	Number of widows (Thousand)			Percentage of widows		
	In receipt of occupational pension	Not in receipt of occupational pension	Total	In receipt of occupational pension	Not in receipt of occupational pension	Total
London	120	190	310	40	60	100
South East	190	170	360	54	46	100
South West	120	120	230	50	50	100
Wales	90	90	180	51	49	100
Scotland	120	140	250	46	54	100
England	1,120	1,230	2,350	48	52	100
All widows	1,330	1,450	2,780	48	52	100

Notes:

1. The figures above are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) 1996–97 data set which are based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland. 1996–97 is the latest year for which information is available.
2. All monetary values are given in April 1998 prices.
3. Estimates are given in thousands and are rounded to the nearest 10,000. Due to rounding components may not sum to totals.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to increase the take-up of occupational pensions. [79743]

Mr. Timms: The latest National Association of Pension Funds Survey shows proportion of eligible employees joining occupational pensions schemes. For final salary schemes the figure has increased from 62 per cent. in 1997 to 86 per cent. in 1998. For Money purchase schemes the comparable figures are 68 per cent. and 75 per cent. In schemes where employers operate automatic entry the figures are over 90 per cent.

We want to do more to encourage people to join occupational pension schemes. In the Green Paper "A new contract for welfare: Partnership in Pensions", we have sought views on how to do this and on whether we should allow employers to require employees to be members of their occupational pension scheme, subject to the right for employees to opt out.

We are currently considering the responses we have received and will be formulating proposals to take action to improve take-up.

Mature Students (Housing Benefits)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on proposed improvements to the situation of those mature students who have recently forfeited housing benefits. [79851]

Angela Eagle: There has been no change in the position of mature students. Most full-time students, including mature students, are not entitled to housing benefit, although certain students in vulnerable groups, such as lone parents, can continue to claim this benefit.

Mental Illness

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce safeguards in respect of the welfare of people with diagnosed mental illness in his benefits review process. [81357]

Mr. Bayley: From the beginning of this month, the Benefit Integrity Project was replaced by a system of periodic inquiry into Disability Living Allowance (DLA) entitlement. This is designed to be fairer to the welfare of vulnerable benefit claimants, including those with mental illness. We have discussed the operational procedures with disability organisations and we are aware that when contacting claimants, we need to take account of their individual circumstances and the effect that this contact may have. We are taking steps to ensure that any periodic inquiry literature issued to claimants, including to those who are diagnosed with a mental illness, is both clear and user-friendly, giving people the opportunity to discuss the best way of obtaining information as to their needs. We have also recognised the need to carry out specialised training on mental health issues for visiting officers and adjudication officers involved in the inquiry process. This training is planned to start in late May.

Certain types of case are exempt from action from the periodic inquiry from the outset. These include certain categories of mental illness, and the full list can be found in the pursuant answer to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *251–52*.

We will continue to discuss the operation of the new arrangements with disability organisations, and will involve them in a comprehensive review of the new system at the end of the first six months of its operation.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the President of the Council what assessment she has made of the implications for her Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [80538]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *239–40*, by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office. The Privy Council Office will participate fully in Government initiatives to improve the representation of ethnic minorities in the Civil Service. The Department has few policy responsibilities which impact directly on racism in society, but it does have responsibility for the appointment of High Sheriffs. There are currently no Sheriffs from the ethnic minorities, and the Privy Council Office wrote last year to the Shrievalty Association

expressing concern. The Association has agreed to address this point specifically in guidance to their members, since under the relevant legislation it is for serving Sheriffs to provide nominations. My Department will continue regularly to monitor the position and to urge action where necessary.

Death Penalty (Commonwealth Countries)

Mr. Cox: To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to her answer of 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column 29, if she will list the Commonwealth countries from which appeals and applications for leave to appeal in cases concerning the death penalty have been submitted; and if she will make a statement. [81579]

Mrs. Beckett: The information requested is as follows:

Country	*Number of appeals*	*Number of applications for leave*
Trinidad and Tobago	7	10
Jamaica	3	4
Antigua and Barbuda	1	—
Belize	1	—
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	—	1
Bermuda	1	—

NORTHERN IRELAND

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the implications for her Department of the Macpherson inquiry recommendations; and if she will make a statement. [80530]

Mr. Ingram: I have been considering the report into the brutal murder of Stephen Lawrence in the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. The report focuses on the Metropolitan Police but it raises many issues for policing and, indeed, society generally. Many of the Lawrence report's recommendations are pertinent in Northern Ireland, not only in terms of how racial differences are addressed, but also in terms of divisions along religious and other lines.

The Government attach great importance to issues of racial equality in Northern Ireland and, in the context of policing, I welcome the first meeting of the Consultative Committee on Policing for Ethnic Minorities hosted recently by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland and the RUC. This Committee will do much to ensure the views of ethnic minority groups are fully understood and their policing needs met. It will develop a greater understanding in the police service of the problems faced by ethnic minorities and provide a means by which these communities can work with the police to provide a better service and have their problems addressed.

The Criminal Justice and Policing section of the Good Friday Agreement recognises that we have a unique opportunity to bring about a society,

"which will recognise the full and equal legitimacy and worth of identities, senses of allegiance and ethos of all sections of the community in Northern Ireland".

This is why the Government established the independent Commission on Policing and the Review of Criminal Justice, which will report later this year. The terms of reference of these two bodies cover many areas highlighted by the report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

None the less, there are a number of areas where I will want to see comparable changes to those set out in my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's action plan for addressing the recommendations of the Lawrence report. On the application of not only race relations legislation, but all Northern Ireland's stringent equality legislation to the police, I want to see as full a coverage as possible. Northern Ireland is already a leader in providing statutory guarantees of equality of treatment and I want to build on this.

Improving community confidence in policing generally is an essential priority. The Police Authority has set an objective in the recently published Policing Plan requiring the Chief Constable to raise public confidence in the RUC in the year 1999–2000. However, in view of the recommendations contained in the Lawrence report, I will examine with the Authority and the Chief Constable what more might be needed to promote racial, religious, sex and disability equality and what meaningful measures can be adopted to ensure this happens. There should be no doubt of the Government's commitment to tackling all forms of discrimination.

Turning to the recommendations which affect police complaints and discipline procedures, we are making important changes. On independent investigations, we are pressing ahead with the establishment of a Police Ombudsman. This will provide for completely independent investigation of complaints against the police and will provide a model for other systems. We want this system to be as transparent as possible. We will also be introducing important reforms of the police conduct and performance procedures and will consider the further changes recommended by the Lawrence report in this area.

While first aid training in the RUC generally meets the standards recommended by the report, we are in touch with the RUC to ensure that any steps necessary to reduce intervals between refresher training are advanced as a matter of urgency. In other aspects of training, the police will build upon the initiatives taken as part of the Community Awareness Programme which already uses outside trainers from a wide variety of organisations. On inspection, similar changes to the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary will be made in Northern Ireland in line with those being made by the Home Secretary.

The Report raises issues about communication between the prosecuting authorities and victims. In Northern Ireland, victims or their families are informed about the progress of their case by the RUC at key stages during the process, and by staff of the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Northern Ireland if any decisions are taken once the case has actually come to court. The experience of those victims and witnesses who are made to feel particularly vulnerable because of the

nature of the offence they are giving evidence about has been considered by a working group since last May. The group will be making recommendations to me in the summer as to how the criminal justice system might better assist such witnesses.

The Stephen Lawrence report highlights the need for co-ordinated action across the public sector if reforms are to be truly effective. For this reason the Government will be seeking to work closely with the new Assembly in Northern Ireland on those recommendations dealing with education and equality law. Consultation with bodies outside central Government will also be required. I have already initiated this action. On the application of the recommendations to those relevant parts of Government that will remain within my area of responsibility after devolution, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *145–46*.

The Government consider the protection of human rights, equality of treatment and respect for different cultures as fundamental aspects of the ethos of the police service in Northern Ireland. A service where, as the Chief Constable has indicated, there is no room for prejudice of any kind and cultural diversity is celebrated. The recommendations of the report on Stephen Lawrence will help us in pursuing this aim.

Maghaberry Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many officer days have been lost through sickness and what percentage of officers at Maghaberry prison have (i) reported sick and (ii) been absent from work for reasons of illness or stress *(a)* over the last month and *(b)* over the same four week period in 1998 and 1997. [80603]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The number of days lost to sickness in the period mentioned is as follows:

	Days
March 1999	2,128
March 1998	1,724
April 1997	1,634

Data for March 1997 are not available.

The average daily percentage of officers on sick leave against total staff in post during the three periods in question is as follows:

	Percentage
March 1999	12.58
March 1998	10.90
March 1997	9.48

The average daily percentage of officers on stress related sick leave against total staff in post during the three periods in question is as follows:

	Percentage
March 1999	2.59
March 1998	3.49
March 1997	1.58

Roads Service

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is her estimate of the savings which will result from the changes introduced into the organisational and regional structures of the Roads Service on the 1 April for the present financial year and the following two years; and to what use such savings will be put. [81159]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive designate, Mr. C Jones. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from C. James to Mr. William Ross, dated April 1999:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to respond to your recently tabled Parliamentary Question about the reorganisation of Roads Service.

Like all public bodies, there is continuing pressure on Roads Service to make the best use of resources available to us. Since we were formed as an Agency in 1996, we have been committed to a programme of improving efficiency but have reached a point where further meaningful efficiencies could not be achieved without a reorganisation of our overall business. This reorganisation, which was introduced on 1 April 1999, was designed to provide a structure, comprising separate business units, which will enable us to focus more directly on how we can continue to deliver our services as efficiently as possible.

The main purpose of the reorganisation was, therefore, to provide a platform for future efficiencies and was not specifically geared to producing immediate savings. The reorganisation, by creating separate business units, will enable us to assess more effectively how efficient our work processes are compared to external organisations with a view to achieving further efficiency gains in future years.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Mr. Pat Finucane

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on her meeting with Mr. Param Cumaraswamy; and if she has agreed to establish a formal inquiry into the death of Mr. Pat Finucane. [81124]

Marjorie Mowlam: I met Mr. Cumaraswamy on Wednesday 14 April. A copy of the statement I issued afterwards is available in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 20 April 1999

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Kosovo (Disaster Relief)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the speed of the disaster relief response to events in Kosovo; and if she will make a statement. [80786]

Clare Short: The international response to the massive refugee outflows was regrettably slow to start with. But the international community has mobilised substantial humanitarian assistance for the refugees in a remarkably short time. The UK has been at the forefront of efforts to speed up the relief operations, notably by providing logistical and other practical support (through airlifts, cargo handling equipment, transport assets, and logistics experts) to overcome practical constraints in assistance delivery.

Disaster Relief

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make it her policy to set up in partnership with NGOs a permanent disaster relief contact point. [80785]

Clare Short: We have an established and effective contact point for disaster and emergency relief in the Department for International Development's Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department. We are also working in close partnership with NGOs concerned with humanitarian assistance, and arrangements for regular contact are in place. I do not believe it would be useful to merge government and NGO response to disasters. My department is able to move very rapidly in the early stages, NGO response takes longer but is highly valued and creates aid outlets for public contributions. Both have important roles to play.

DEFENCE

Yugoslavia

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which weapons currently targeted on Yugoslavia contain depleted uranium. [81087]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey), on 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *43*.

Defence Council Instructions

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a list of unclassified Defence Council Instructions which have been issued since 1 December 1998. [80827]

Mr. Spellar: There have been 314 unclassified DCIs issued since 1 December 1998 and I am today placing a list in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Berlin Summit

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister for which areas of gross receipts of EU moneys it was decided that the United Kingdom total would diminish as a consequence of the Berlin summit; by how much; and if he will make a statement. [81224]

The Prime Minister: The Berlin European Council decided the ceilings on spending across the EU on each major policy category. It did not decide how much was to be spent in each state: that is largely a matter for the Commission's management of the budget. While the Council did make decisions about the rules for allocating the structural and cohesion funds, the Commission has yet to announce the allocations from the Funds for each Member State. These figures will not be available until the regulations are finally approved in May.

Political Honours Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Prime Minister what changes he has made in the composition of the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee. [81680]

The Prime Minister: Members are traditionally Privy Counsellors who are not members of the Government. Following the resignation of Lord Pym, I have appointed the Lord Hurd of Westwell to be a member of the Committee. He will join Lord Thomson of Monifieth and Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde. Lord Thomson has been appointed to chair the Committee.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Victims Liaison Unit

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been allocated to the Victims Liaison Unit; and how much has been spent and on what projects. [80232]

Mr. Ingram: To date the Victims Liaison Unit has been allocated the £5 million announced by the Prime Minister in his statement of 12 May 1998. The Unit has been consulting widely with the victims community with a view to identifying needs and prioritising how this money can best be allocated. In the meantime, I have announced a number of significant funding initiatives to the value of £2,196,170, to support victims and a Newsletter outlining progress has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

The allocation to date can be summarised as follows:

£

Allocation	*Amount*
The Northern Ireland Memorial Fund	1,000,000
The Trauma Centre	700,000
The Educational Bursary Scheme	250,000
Community Groups Projects—to be administered by the Community Relations Council	200,000

£

Allocation	Amount
WAVE (to extend their outreach service)	30,000
Disability Action (a pilot scheme for disabled victims)	6,170
Survivors of Trauma (a pilot scheme for elderly, housebound victims)	5,000
Shankill Stress Centre (a pilot scheme for adolescent victims)	5,000

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) of 10 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 285, on research into the production of genetically modified grasses for grazing, what procedures would need to be adopted under what legislation for the production of such crops for *(a)* research, including legal grazing by animals and *(b)* sale for grazing; and what powers he has to prohibit such activity. [72181]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* All research releases of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are governed by the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992 (amended in 1995 and 1997) which give effect to Part VI of the Environment Protection Act 1990 and implement the EC Directive 90/220/EEC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms.

Anyone intending to produce or grow genetically modified grasses for research purposes requires a consent from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. This includes the requirement to carry out a detailed environmental risk assessment.

For grazing to be permitted on grasses grown for research purposes, the consent would have explicitly to include this permission. This would be allowed only where the applicant could show that such activities would involve negligible risk.

The sale of genetically modified grasses is governed by EC Directive 90/220 on the deliberate release of GMOs. No GMO may be sold without a consent issued under this Directive. A notifier may apply through any EC Member State, which then invites comments from all other Member States before an agreement is reached at Community level. The marketing consent is then valid across the EC.

The Secretary of State may prohibit or restrict the release of the GMO where information comes to light indicating risk to human health or the environment. Where this involves the sale of a GMO product, the provisional restriction must be cleared by the European Community in order to have permanent effect.

Speed Limits

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he plans to take to raise public awareness of maximum national speed limits for various classes of road vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [79691]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Details of the national speed limits are contained in the Highway Code. The theory test for learner drivers of all classes of vehicles contains appropriate questions about different speed limits. Although we have no immediate plans to publicise vehicle speed limits more widely, we will look at the issue of vehicle speed limit signing as part of the wider review of speed management policy which is currently under way.

Crosby Driving Test Centre

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information was provided to staff at Crosby Driving Test Centre, prior to its closure, concerning the future of the test centre and its staff. [80722]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Staff at the Crosby centre were kept informed about its future in the months prior to March 1998 by their line management, and relocations to neighbouring test centres in the event of Crosby closing were discussed. On 10 March 1998, the Driving Standards Agency's Northern Area Deputy Manager wrote to staff at the Crosby test centre. The note confirmed oral briefings the staff had already received from their local Supervising Examiner and provided an update about the imminent expiry of the lease on the centre at the end of March.

London Underground

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to establish a public interest company or trust for the London Underground. [81117]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Our plan is to implement a public-private partnership for London Underground. This will require changes to the structure of London Underground as a company, so that it becomes an operations business, responsible for operating train services and stations. It will remain in the public sector and will transfer in due course to the Greater London Authority and Transport for London, restoring local democratic accountability for its performance. We have no plans to establish a trust.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the financial advice given to his Department and London Transport indicated that a public private partnership for London Underground represented best value. [81116]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The financial advice which informed our decision to pursue a public-private partnership for London Underground suggested that this route was likely to offer best value. The reasons for the Government's choice of the option currently being taken forward by London Underground were set out in a paper, "London Underground Public-Private Partnership: Facts and Analysis", which was deposited in the Library on 20 March 1998.

London Transport

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *404*, on London Transport, what is the asset value of buildings held by London Transport. [81115]

Ms Glenda Jackson: As at 31 March 1998, the total net value for the London Transport Group, net of depreciation and disposals and based on (1) infrastructure and other property and (2) assets in the course of construction, is £6,133.1 million.

Water Metering

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations he has had with water companies and the Water Regulator about extending the scope of water metering to include homes which have undergone extensions and conversions since 1990. [80904]

Mr. Meale: Under the Water Industry Act 1991, water undertakers may fix charges by reference to such matters, and may adopt such methods and principles for the calculation and imposition of the charges, as appear to them to be appropriate. They therefore have considerable scope to extend metering to customers, including to those whose properties have been extended or converted since 1990.

However, clause 7 of the Water Industry Bill, currently before Parliament, would introduce a new right for households to remain on an unmeasured charge in their present homes, save where they are meeting certain conditions. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment indicated during the Second Reading of the Bill, 7 December 1998, *Official Report*, column 46, that we envisaged the right to remain on an unmeasured charge would not apply where premises are used for commercial purposes, where there is a garden sprinkler or swimming pool use, where they have a power shower consuming more than 20 litres per minute or where there is use of a water-softening unit that requires backwashing.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has had from each regional development agency concerning the budgets given to them by his Department; what his response has been; if he will list the regional development agencies with which his Department is in dispute over the budget allocation; what mechanisms he plans to introduce to enable regional development agencies to negotiate for their budgets in the future; what impact disputes between the regional development agencies and his Department on the budget allocation are having on the day-to-day running of the agencies; and if he will make a statement. [80795]

Mr. Meale: My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning has received a letter from the Chairman of the South West of England Regional Development Agency about funding for staff engaged on projects to regenerate the Royal William Yard, Plymouth and Temple Quay, Bristol. Discussions are taking place between officials of the Department and officers of the Agency and my right hon. Friend will reply to the Chairman as soon as these are complete.

There have also been contacts between officials in the Department and officers in other regional development agencies about their budgets. These discussions have been constructive and do not amount to our being "in dispute" with the agencies.

For future years, the agencies will bid for resources as part of an annual corporate planning round.

Water Charges

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to cap the prices charged by water companies which raise their charges by unjustifiable amounts; and if he will make a statement. [80787]

Mr. Meale: Water companies in England and Wales are subject to economic regulation by the Director General of Water Services. The Director General sets annual price limits and oversees the operation of the tariff basket, to which overall price limits apply.

Council Tax

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* expected and *(b)* actual receipts from council tax for each year since the council tax was introduced. [80789]

Ms Armstrong: The information requested is in the table.

Expected receipts are the total amount that councils billed for, net of reliefs and council tax benefits, in respect of each financial year and do not, therefore, make an allowance for non-collection.

The actual receipts are the amounts received in each financial year against that year's council tax bills. Five authorities in 1994–95 were unable to provide this figure, so a figure of their total council tax receipts minus receipts for arrears has been used. The same applies to one authority in 1995–96.

£ million

	Expected receipts	*Actual receipts*
1993–94	7,349	6,807
1994–95	7,721	7,220
1995–96	8,220	7,770
1996–97	8,830	8,404
1997–98	9,562	9,134

Shorthold Tenancies

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to seek powers to prevent the practice of charging rent premiums on assured shorthold tenancy renewals; and if he will make a statement. [81143]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no plans at present to seek powers to prevent the practice of some landlords and letting agents charging fees to renew assured shorthold tenancy agreements. However, we will keep the situation

under review and if there is clear evidence that there is significant abuse, we will consider whether anything can be done to prevent excessive fees from being charged.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the objectors to the application to release genetically modified organisms in Monmouthshire. [81347]

Mr. Meacher: The objectors who wrote to the Department to raise concerns about the proposed release were private individuals and we do not have their authority to publish their names.

Greater London Authority

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce the interim location of the Greater London Authority. [81575]

Mr. Raynsford: I expect to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Dolphins

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will investigate the appearance on beaches in the South West of beheaded dolphins; and if he will make a statement. [81393]

Mr. Meale: The Department continues to contract the Institute of Zoology to post-mortem small cetaceans that strand around the shores of England and Wales. The two animals found since the beginning of 1999 on the south Devon coast, which were reported to have been decapitated, were not post-mortemed because they were in too decomposed a state to yield reliable results.

Pensioners (Fuel Poverty)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures the Government have taken to tackle fuel poverty in pensioner households. [80944]

Mr. Meale: We have taken a number of actions to help people suffering from fuel poverty, including pensioner households.

We have reduced the level of VAT on fuel, so that people can more easily afford to keep warm. We have also reduced the VAT on energy saving materials installed through Government grant schemes, so that they can more easily insulate their homes. We are now exploring with the European Commission the possibility of a wider reduction in VAT on energy saving materials.

We have released substantial additional funds to help improve our housing stock; in total some £5 billion is being made available over the lifetime of this Parliament for investment in housing. Most of the additional resources are going to local authorities and will be spent according to the needs and priorities identified in their housing strategy. We estimate that around one third of the money is likely to lead directly or indirectly to improvements in energy efficiency.

We have also allocated an additional £150 million specifically to tackling fuel poverty through domestic energy efficiency improvements. This is in addition to the existing £75 million a year expenditure on the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, our main programme to help insulate the homes of the neediest householders.

But we recognise that many of today's pensioners face particular difficulties, and, in his recent Budget statement the Chancellor announced an increase in the annual Winter Fuel Payment to £100 for every eligible pensioner household.

We are additionally reviewing our fuel poverty policy, to establish how our increased programme can deliver more help to the most vulnerable households. My Department has held discussions with over 60 organisations active in this field. We will shortly publish our proposals on the way ahead for consultation, reviewing them in the light of responses, with the intention being to act as soon as possible thereafter.

Elderly People (Social Housing)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to improve the provision of adequate social housing for the elderly. [80945]

Mr. Raynsford: Our aim is to offer everyone the opportunity of a decent home and so promote social cohesion, well-being and self-dependence. The provision of good quality, efficiently managed social housing plays an important part in meeting that aim for older people and for other groups.

Over the life of this Parliament, we are making an additional £5 billion available for housing in England, fulfilling our manifesto commitment on the release of capital receipts from the sale of council housing. Most of these additional resources are being directed through local authorities, who need to develop housing strategies for meeting the needs of all groups in their area including older people and to make investment decisions based on robust local assessments of housing need.

Organic Solvents

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received concerning the incidence of serious illnesses amongst women employed in the electronics industry who are, or have been, exposed to organic solvents and other chemicals; and if he will make a statement. [81127]

Mr. Meale: I have received no recent direct representations on this subject. I am, however, aware of media interest and public concern surrounding the issue.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information he has obtained concerning the possible link between the exposure to organic solvents of women employed in the electronics industry and the incidence amongst women of *(a)* leukaemia, *(b)* breast cancer, *(c)* other forms of cancer and *(d)* foetal abnormalities; and if he will make a statement. [81126]

Mr. Meale: Some organic solvents used in the electronics industry at exposure levels above the legal occupational exposure limits can cause a variety of known health effects, but the Health and Safety Executive believes there is no link with leukaemia, breast cancer or other forms of cancer.

There is a body of scientific literature suggesting a possible association between excessive exposure to various organic solvents and foetal abnormalities, but the evidence is inconclusive and it is not specific to the electronics industry.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has commissioned recently on the effects on workers of the use of organic solvents in industry; and if he will make a statement. [81129]

Mr. Meale: Over the past three years, the Health and Safety Executive has commissioned much research on the effects on workers of the use of organic solvents.

Specific studies have included an investigation into spontaneous abortion in the UK semiconductor industry, an assessment of the hazards from cleaning chemical use in the catering industry, and the neurotoxicity of paint solvents.

Semiconductor Industry (Miscarriages)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the risk of miscarriage to women working in the Scottish semiconductor industry relative to that of women working in other industries; and if he will make a statement. [81150]

Mr. Meale: In 1998, the Health and Safety Executive published the results of an investigation into miscarriages among women in the UK semiconductor industry, a copy of which is in the Library. No separate assessment was made for women who worked in Scotland. The study found no evidence that the incidence of miscarriage in workers in the UK semiconductor industry was higher than the national average.

Railway Funding

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his oral answer of 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column 5, what plans he has to issue a consultation paper on his proposals for the public funding arrangements for the railways; and if he will list the representations he has received on this matter. [81601]

Dr. Reid: We suggested in the White Paper (Cm 3950) "A New Deal for Transport" and in our response (Cm 4204) to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's Report on the Strategic Rail Authority and Railway Regulation that a proportion of access charges might be paid direct by the SRA rather than via the train operating companies. The Deputy Prime Minister asked the Rail Regulator for his views on the advantages and disadvantages of direct funding; we expect to receive them shortly. Since publication of the White Paper and our response to the Select Committee, we have received a number of representations on the public funding arrangements for the railways.

Steeply Sloping Plots

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the definition of a steeply sloping plot within Part M of the Building Regulations which come into force in October will be based solely on the topography of the site. [81445]

Mr. Raynsford: The new Approved Document for Part M of the Building Regulations makes no reference to the topography of the site, as this will change with excavation and earth moving. A steeply sloping plot is defined as a plot gradient of more than 1 in 15. Plot gradient is defined as the gradient measured between the finished floor level of the dwelling and the point of access, which is the point at which a person visiting a dwelling would normally alight from a vehicle prior to approaching the dwelling. This point may be within or outside the plot. The guidance in the Approved Document anticipates that in most circumstances it should be possible to provide a level or ramped approach and a stepped approach would be the exception, used only when unavoidable.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Millennium Compliance

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the President of the Council what information the Government will be giving to the general public about the millennium bug; and if she will make a statement. [81699]

Mrs. Beckett: The public should look principally to goods and services providers for advice about the likely effect of the date change on supply. The Government and Action 2000 are encouraging organisations to communicate with their customers. For instance, the British Bankers Association, APACS and the Building Societies Association have published (on 5 March) "Your Money and the Millennium", reassuring customers that cash machines will work and that there will be ample supplies of bank notes, so that customers do not need to hoard them.

There is a role for the Government in bringing together basic information so that the public can have an overall picture of the likely impact of the Bug on their daily lives. In October 1998, Action 2000 published "Homecheck": this provided practical advice about the impact of the Bug on domestic appliances and PCs. The Government will build on this with the issue of further information, beginning in the late Spring, supported by limited TV and press advertising. This will cost around £5 million. The information will also be available from the Action 2000 Actionline and on its website.

The information programme will be underpinned by market research tracking changes in public perception of the Millennium Bug, particularly among key sub-groups like the elderly. The first results from this market research are being placed in the libraries of the House and published on the Internet today.

Action 2000 will continue to release information through the National Infrastructure Forum about the independent assessment of the readiness to meet the date change of providers of critical public services. It will also encourage them to communicate these messages to their

customers. Action 2000 will be using press advertising to give this important information maximum publicity. This will cost some £2 million.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Landmark Projects

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how much money the Millennium Commission has paid to external consultants in respect of each of the Landmark projects; [80693]

(2) what *(a)* external advice and *(b)* consultancy work has been procured by the Millennium Commission in respect of the Portsmouth Landmark Project; [80694]

(3) what advice and guidelines the Millennium Commission has given to local authorities involved with Millennium Landmark projects; [80700]

(4) what were the original guidelines agreed for Millennium Landmark projects; and which projects do not meet those guidelines; [80701]

(5) which members of the Millennium Commission have been involved in the Portsmouth Landmark Project; [80702]

(6) which Millennium Landmark projects will receive more than 50 per cent. of their funding from the Millennium Commission; [80703]

(7) how much money the Millennium Commission has *(i)* paid and (ii) agreed to pay towards the Portsmouth Landmark Project; for what elements of the scheme the money was paid; and what percentage this represents of the total cost of the project; [80704]

(8) what changes have been agreed with the Millennium Commission on the planned opening date for the Millennium Tower in Portsmouth since the project's inception; and what is the current target date; [80705]

(9) what are the expected completion dates for each Millennium Landmark project; [80706]

(10) how much money has been spent to date by the Millennium Commission on each Millennium Landmark project; [80707]

(11) if he will make a statement on the progress of each Millennium Landmark project. [80708]

Mr. Chris Smith: These are matters for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80412]

Mr. Chris Smith: We do not expect the Treaty of Amsterdam to result in any significant new responsibilities for this Department. The Department regularly reviews its staffing arrangements in relation to European Union business but has no plans to alter these specifically in relation to the Treaty.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since May 1997; and what percentage of them received a substantive reply on that day. [80730]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 15 April 1999]*: Between 1 May 1997 and 15 April 1999, a total of 828 named day parliamentary questions were tabled for answer by my Department. Of these, 26 per cent. (214) received a substantive reply on the day requested.

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Family and Parenting Institute

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the constitution for the National Family and Parenting Institute; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [80812]

Mr. Boateng: The Government announced the establishment of the Trustee Board of the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) on 15 March 1999. The NFPI is an independent charity which will be supported by Government funding of £2 million over the next three years. The NFPI has just been incorporated as a company. As such, the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the NFPI are a public document held at Companies House. I have requested that a copy be sent to the Library.

Body Piercing

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with local authorities concerning the body piercing of minors. [81422]

Mr. Boateng: In 1996, the then Government consulted on proposals affecting local authority control of skin piercing businesses. We have concluded that legislation which would give local authorities outside London powers to regulate cosmetic body piercing businesses, should be introduced as soon as Parliamentary time can be found. There has, however, been no consultation specifically relating to the body piercing of minors.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will introduce legislation to prohibit body piercing of minors without their parents' or guardians' consent; [81424]

(2) if he will list the statutory provisions which cover the body piercing of minors; [81423]

Mr. Boateng: Tattooing of children under the age of 18 is an offence under the Tattooing of Minors Act 1969. As regards the piercing of one person's body by another person, this could, in certain circumstances, be held to be an assault.

When it comes to other forms of body piercing, the question of what is a valid consent is governed by common law. Whether an offence has been caused therefore depends on the circumstances of each particular case. The degree of competence that can be exercised by children will depend in each case on the relative maturity of the child concerned, as well as upon his or her age.

In English law, the age of majority is 18 years. If a person under the age of 18 is capable of understanding the nature of the act that is being done, he or she is capable of giving a valid consent to it unless Statute provides otherwise.

Other types of body piercing, however, are not necessarily subject to these provisions. For example, children under the age of 16 cannot consent to what would otherwise be an indecent assault; whether an indecent assault occurred would depend on the facts of the individual case. Any establishment offering certain types of body piercing would, therefore, need to satisfy themselves as to the age of their customer and that he/she was capable of giving a valid consent.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning body piercing of minors. [81425]

Mr. Boateng: We have received a small number of letters from Members of Parliament and members of the general public asking us to give further consideration to the introduction of the new legislation.

Tattoos and Piercing

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regulations govern the minimum age at which a person can *(a)* be tattooed, *(b)* have their ears pierced and *(c)* have other parts of the body pierced. [80860]

Mr. Boateng: Tattooing of children under the age of 18 is an offence under the Tattooing of Minors Act 1969. There are no specific regulations setting a specific minimum age for other forms of body piercing. The question of what is a valid consent is governed by common law. Whether an offence has been caused therefore depends on the circumstances of each particular case. The degree of competence that can be exercised by children will depend in each case on the relative maturity of the child concerned, as well as upon his or her age. The Courts have held that if a person under the age of 18 is capable of understanding the nature of the act that is being done, he or she is capable of giving a valid consent to it unless Statute provides otherwise.

Other types of body piercing, however, are not necessarily subject to these provisions. For example, children under the age of 16 cannot consent to what would otherwise be an indecent assault; whether an indecent assault occurred would depend on the facts of the individual case. Any establishment offering certain types of body piercing would therefore need to satisfy themselves as to the age of their customer and that he/she was capable of giving a valid consent.

Lorry Drivers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has obtained regarding the legality of demonstrations by lorry drivers. [81599]

Mr. Boateng: None. The enforcement of road traffic and public order legislation is an operational matter for individual chief officers of police. It is for them to enforce the law in the light of any action taken by lorry drivers.

Cleveland Police

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in Cleveland Police Force are under investigation in the Redwood inquiry; how many have been charged; and if he will make a statement. [81165]

Mr. Boateng: The "Redwood" inquiry is an on-going investigation and, for operational reasons, it would be inappropriate at this stage to make any further comment.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of serving CID officers in Cleveland Police Force are under investigation in the Lancet inquiry in the boroughs of *(a)* Middlesbrough, *(b)* Stockton, *(c)* Langbaurgh and *(d)* Hartlepool; and if he will make a statement. [81164]

Mr. Boateng: Operation Lancet is currently investigating 31 Criminal Investigation Department (CID) officers. Eight of the 31 are suspended from duty. The remaining 23 officers are currently serving as follows:

(a) 15 out of a total strength of 46 CID officers at Middlesbrough

(b) 1 out of a total strength of 30 CID officers at Stockton

(c) 6 out of a total strength of 32 CID officers at Langbaurgh

(d) None at Hartlepool

(e) 1 out of a total strength of 104 CID officers at Force Headquarters.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of the police operations which are directed towards disciplinary offences in the Cleveland Police. [80798]

Mr. Boateng: The identity of police operations directed towards disciplinary offences is an operational matter for the Chief Constable of Cleveland, but it is well known that Operation Lancet is an inquiry into allegations of criminal and disciplinary offences against some Cleveland Police officers.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are working on the *(a)* Lancet and *(b)* Redwood inquiries into Cleveland Police; and if he will make a statement. [80797]

Mr. Boateng: There are 21 police officers currently working on Operation Lancet. Three of those officers are from Northamptonshire Police. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *11*.

Immigration Services

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of applicants who will seek to register with the Immigration Services Commissioner in the first year of operation. [81405]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is difficult to predict with any certainty how many immigration advisers will seek to register with the Immigration Services Commissioner in

that body's first year of operation. Our best estimate is that about 200 individuals and organisations will seek to register.

Citizenship Ceremony

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a ceremony to mark the award of UK citizenship. [81353]

Mr. Straw: As I indicated in a lecture on Citizenship which I gave in Liverpool on 12 April, I am in principle in favour of such ceremonies. I have asked officials to look into the possibility of introducing them into the United Kingdom. Upon completion of their examination, I shall make a statement to the House.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the scanning of existing files in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate onto computer is scheduled *(a)* to commence and *(b)* to be completed. [80771]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There has never been any intention of scanning onto computer all 4.5 million of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's existing registered paper files.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of when the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will return to the level of casework it was achieving prior to the implementation of new work arrangements and its relocation to new offices. [80769]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are positive signs of improvement in many of the business areas of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. But before accurate projections can be made of output of casework in a team-based environment, the recovery team I have established needs to review and collect further data on productivity. Projections of output improvement will be available in June.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff employed in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate have *(a)* resigned and *(b)* requested a transfer to another department in (i) the last six months and (ii) each of the last five years. [80767]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: A total of 112 staff resigned from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in the six months October 1998 to March 1999. Resignations for the previous five annual years is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1998	363
1997	250
1996	149
1995	106
1994	110

The significantly higher 1998 figure can be attributed to a higher than usual number of resignations in the junior grade of Administrative Assistant. This is largely due to a significant increase in the number of casual staff employed during this period, a number of whom resigned during the period of their appointment.

Information on the number of staff requesting transfers to other departments for the periods specified is not available.

Hillsborough Disaster

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a list of all the documents *(a)* which have been made available for public consultation in respect of the Hillsborough disaster and *(b)* which have since been withdrawn. [81111]

Mr. Boateng: Following the Home Secretary's announcement of the outcome of Lord Justice Stuart-Smith's scrutiny of the Hillsborough disaster, as much of the evidence considered by the scrutiny as possible was placed in the Library. The material is comprised of:

Transcripts of interviews with those who gave evidence to Lord Justice Stuart-Smith;

Other records of discussions held by Lord Justice Stuart-Smith, where transcripts were not made;

Written evidence provided to Lord Justice Stuart-Smith by witnesses;

Other written statements consulted at the request of the families;

Statements by South Yorkshire Police officers (in their original and amended forms);

Oral and written submissions made to Lord Justice Stuart Smith by Counsel and others on behalf of the Family Support Group;

Transcripts of Lord Justice Stuart-Smith's Open Meeting on 6 October and meeting with Counsel for the Family Support Group on 30 September;

South Yorkshire Police Operational Orders for the 1988 and 1989 semi-finals;

Statements by the Police Complaints Authority;

Report produced by David Phillips of Devon and Cornwall Constabulary at request of South Yorkshire Police;

Report by Noel Burne (structural engineer) at the request of South Yorkshire Police Authority;

Police videotapes TB1, 2, 3 and 4;

Written evidence provided to Lord Justice Stuart-Smith by those whom he consulted.

The names of those who gave written or oral evidence to the scrutiny, and those whom Lord Justice Stuart-Smith consulted, are set out in Appendix 1 of his report.

No documents have been withdrawn from the Library.

Crime Figures (Middlesbrough)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish for the last six months Middlesbrough's monthly crime figures. [80799]

Mr. Boateng: The requested data are not available centrally. Recorded crime data for England and Wales for the 1998–99 year, which are collected quarterly by police force area, will be published by the Home Office in October 1999.

Police Scientific Development Branch

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which scientific journals and

other open publications staff from the Police Scientific Development Branch (Sandridge) have published papers since January 1997; and on what date the papers appeared in each of the journals and publications. [80831]

Mr. Boateng: The Police Scientific Development Branch has published the following papers since January 1997:

"Replacements for CFC113 in the Ninhydrin Process: Parts 1". D. F. Hewlett and V. G. Sears. J. Forensic Ident., 1997, 47, 287.

"Replacements for CFC113 in the Ninhydrin Process: Parts 2". D. F. Hewlett, V. G. Sears and S. Suzuki. J. Forensic Ident., 1997, 47, 300.

"Specification for a Police Video Enhancement System". T. Collins. European Conference on Security and Detection, 28–30 April 1997.

Testing Times for Body Armour. M. J. Pettit. Police Review Magazine 1997.

Self Defence Equipment—Performance Standards and Specifications. Dr. J. Tan. APPS Police and Industry Conference Proceedings 1997.

"Low Angle X-ray Scatter for Explosives Detection: a Geometry Optimization". Luggar R. D., Horrocks J. A., Speller R. D. & Lacey R. J. Appl. Radiat. Osot, Vol 48, No.2, 1997.

"Exploitation of X-Ray Technology for the Detection of Contraband—Aviation Security Applications". Murray N. C., Lacey R. J. & Mason P. H. ECOS '97 European Conference on Security and Detection, Vol. 437, April 1997.

"Some Advances in the Use of Raman Spectroscopy in Security Screening Applications". Lacey R. J. ECOS '97 European Conference on Security and Detection, Vol. 437, April 1997.

"Developments in Contraband Detection Using X-ray Technology". Murray N. C., Lacey R. J., Mason P. M., Rushbrooke J. G. 1997 ONDCP International Symposium, Applied Counterdrug Law Enforcement Technology.

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"AMETHYST. Automatic Alarm Assessment: becoming a reality" Michael Horner et al. Proceedings of the International Carnahan Conference on Security Technology 1997.

"Physical Security—where are we going?" G. L. Thomas and M. J. Thompson. Proceedings of the International Carnahan Conference on Security Technology 1997.

"Specification for a police video enhancement system". T. Collins. Proceedings of the International Carnahan Conference on Security Technology 1997.

"Active fence structures and toppings" I. Wassell. Proceedings of the International Carnahan Conference on Security Technology 1997.

"Sensitivity variations in linear microphonic cables". G. Leach & M. Horner. Proceedings of the International Carnahan Conference on Security Technology 1997.

"Good practice for the management and operation of town centre CCTV". E. Wallace et al. ECOS '97 European Conference on Security & Detection April 1997.

"A single performance measure for perimeter intruder detection systems". G. J. Leach. ECOS '97 European Conference on Security & Detection April 1997.

"Enhancing the performance of fences: effects and evaluation". I. J. Wassell. ECOS '97 European Conference on Security & Detection April 1997.

"A digital fingerprint capture workstation". T. Kent & J. Rason. International Association of Investigations Conference 1998. Little Rock, USA.

"The dependence of detection system performance on fence construction and detector location". S. Tarr & G. Leach. Proceedings of the International Carnahan Conference on Security Technology 1998.

"Measuring the image quality of digital cameras". J. J. Rason. RPS Medical and Forensic Imaging Symposium. Both April 1998.

"Detection of drugs and related compounds by Raman spectroscopy". R. J. Lacey et al. ONDCP International Conference on counter-drug technology. Washington March 1999.

Kosovan Refugees

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contingency plans he has to house Kosovan refugees in British seaside resorts; and if he will make a statement. [80906]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government's priority remains to ensure that as far as possible, Kosovan refugees receive protection in the region so that they can return easily to their homes when it is safe for them to do so. However, contingency planning is well in hand if the United Kingdom needs to receive a programme of refugees from Kosovo.

We have no specific plans to house refugees in British seaside resorts, but are looking at accommodation throughout the United Kingdom that could be used for reception centres where refugees could be cared for prior to moving into more permanent accommodation.

Sergeant Virdi

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the time when (i) inappropriate material relating to Sergeant Virdi's case was created on the police computer system and (ii) Sergeant Virdi was recorded as acting as custody officer at Acton early on 24 December 1997, *(b)* the time when Sergeant Virdi was first (i) interviewed, (ii) cautioned, (iii) arrested, (iv) first and (v) last put under surveillance, *(c)* the time when inappropriate material was created on the police computer system in January 1998, and which officers were (i) interviewed, (ii) cautioned, (iii) arrested and (iv) put under surveillance; whether he received a report on the investigation and recording of the racial attack in 15 March 1998 in which Sergeant Virdi was an arresting officer; when and why Sergeant Virdi was reprimanded for maintaining his interest in the police activity relating to the racial attack; on which occasions Sergeant Virdi's senior officers used any independent element in investigating the events and complaints; what were the numbers and ranks of police officers involved in searching Sergeant Virdi's home on 15 April 1998, and the time taken in the search; what was the normal purpose and use of a POLSA search; and when and how material from Sergeant Virdi's locker at Hanwell was taken to the police station safe at Ealing. [80631]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that disciplinary proceedings are still being considered in relation to Sergeant Virdi. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment: on the points *(a)*(i); *(a)*(ii); *(c)*; *(c)*(i); *(c)*(ii); *(c)*(iii); *(c)*(iv); on the occasions when Sergeant Virdi's senior officers used any independent element in investigating the events and complaints: or on the numbers and ranks of police officers conducting the search of Sergeant Virdi's home on 15 April 1998.

In relation to points *(b)*(i); *(b)*(ii); *(b)*(iii); *(b)*(iv); and *(b)*(v), the Commissioner tells me that Sergeant Virdi was first interviewed at 1.39 pm on 17 April 1998, arrested and cautioned at 10.53 am on 15 April 1998, and put under surveillance on 15 April 1998.

The Home Secretary is not routinely informed of racial attacks and was not informed of the attack in Ealing Division. The Commissioner informs me that Sergeant Virdi has not been reprimanded in relation to this incident.

The Commissioner tells me that a POLSA search is one conducted by a team of officers specifically trained to national standards. POLSA teams have a role in counter-terrorist searches and undertake evidence gathering in searches in support of major investigations.

The Commissioner has confirmed that property was taken from Sergeant Virdi's locker at Hanwell Police Station and placed in the safe at Ealing Police Station. This has been reported as a theft by Sergeant Virdi and is under investigation. As at 15 April, it has not been established who moved the property and when it was moved.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Kosovans have appealed for asylum in the United Kingdom per month since 1 January 1998. [80448]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information given in the table relates to applications for asylum submitted from nationals of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. To break this down into the number of Kosovans could be obtained only by examination of individual case records and is, therefore, available only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum applications[1] received in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, 1998 and 1999, by month, nationals of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

	Number
January 1998	270
February 1998	270
March 1998	280
April 1998	385
May 1998	315
June 1998	680
July 1998	845
August 1998	905
September 1998	870
October 1998	1,160
November 1998	735
December 1998	675
January 1999	710
February 1999	550
Total	8,650

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5

Immigration

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of applicants' passports held at the Immigration and Nationality Department awaiting a decision; what arrangements he will make for temporary travel documents to be issued for those whose applications are delayed as a result of reorganisation at IND; and what proposals he has for offering compensation to those who are disadvantaged as a result of the delays. [76615]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[pursuant to his reply, 18 March 1999, c. 720–22]:* There are approximately 139,000 cases awaiting action in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, of which approximately 22,000 contain passports. Travel Documents will be issued only to people who have valid leave to remain in the United Kingdom. It is, therefore, not possible to issue documents where an application for leave remains outstanding, although passports will be returned to applicants where they need to travel. Compensation will be paid only in cases of maladministration where the costs are reasonable and have been actually and necessarily incurred; each case will be treated on its merits.

TREASURY

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to paragraph 5.81 in Budget 99 (HC 298), what detailed procedures will be followed to undertake the environmental appraisals. [81396]

Ms Hewitt: The procedures to be followed when undertaking environmental appraisals are set out in Government guidance on "Policy Appraisal and the Environment" (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1998). These guidelines make clear that a policy should be subject to a full environmental appraisal when it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, and that the level of resources devoted to each appraisal should be proportionate to the policy or programme.

This guidance applies equally to the Budget measures, and it is the approach used when evaluating the numerous options which are considered in preparation for the Budget.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the additional income and staff required by the Financial Services Authority if it assumes regulatory responsibility for loans secured on land as *(a)* first mortgages within the scope of the Council of Mortgage Lenders Code, *(b)* other loans secured on land with a value over £25,000 and *(c)* consumer credit loans with a value below £25,000. [81591]

Ms Hewitt: I have asked the Financial Services Authority to carry out this analysis and will take it into account in the review, to be carried out later this year, of whether mortgage advice should be regulated.

VAT Rules

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the procedure by which Customs and Excise informs businesses of changes to the VAT rules; and if he will make a statement. [81590]

Ms Hewitt: Customs and Excise use a variety of ways to inform business of changes to the VAT rules. In all cases, changes are notified by VAT Notes, which are sent to all VAT registered businesses. Changes which stem from the Budget are announced in Customs and Excise Budget Notices, available from local VAT offices on Budget Day, after the Chancellor has sat down. Other changes are notified to businesses by Business Briefs, also available from local VAT offices and issued to subscribers. All these publications are also available on the Internet.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what systems are in place to enable his Department to notify self-employed people paying National Insurance contributions by direct debit, that those payments are not being received. [80934]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The Department is not aware of any occasions where payments by direct debit, from self-employed customers, have not been received.

On those occasions when the Department, as a result of problems, has been unable to collect National Insurance Contributions from Self Employed Customers, it has identified and written to all those affected.

Cigarettes

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the average retail price of a packet of 20 cigarettes in each member state of the European Union. [81587]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows:

Cigarettes

Pence

Member state	*Retail selling price per pack of 20 cigarettes*
Austria	163
Belgium	184
Denmark	283
Finland	260
France	210
Germany	189
Greece	128
Ireland	280
Italy	134
Luxembourg	128
Netherlands	171
Portugal	122
Spain	80
Sweden	267
UK	364

Source:

European Commission (Directorate General XXI) Excise Duty Tables (December 1998).

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the proportion of the average retail price of a packet of 20 cigarettes which is taken in tax on each member state of the European Union. [81589]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows:

Cigarettes

Percentage

Member State	*Total Tax as proportion of retail selling price per pack of 20 Cigarettes*
Austria	74.0
Belgium	74.6
Denmark	81.7
Finland	76.2
France	75.4
Germany	70.8
Greece	72.7
Ireland	77.3
Italy	74.7
Luxembourg	68.6
Netherlands	71.9
Portugal	79.7
Spain	73.1
Sweden	70.3
UK	79.3

Source:

European Commission (Directorate General XXI) Excise Duty Tables (December 1998)

ISA Advertisements

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which authorised person under the Financial Services Act 1986 approved the Inland Revenue ISA advertisements. [81105]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* No such approval was needed.

KPMG

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* consultancy and *(b)* other contracts his Department has had with KPMG since 1 May 1997; and if KPMG is a prospective candidate for contracts his Department is intending to let. [81421]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* The Treasury has let two contracts with KPMG since May 1997, one for consultancy on "Credit Risk Policy" for the Debt Management Office, and the other to carry out a telephone survey on "Small to Medium Enterprises".

KPMG is a prospective candidate for future contracts. The contracts cannot be disclosed as they are commercially confidential until an award has been announced.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what investigations he carried out into the levels of emissions from cars of under 1100 cc before reducing the vehicle excise duty on those vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [81258]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor proposed reducing VED on the smallest cars in the 1998 Budget. He issued a consultation document setting out the options for reforming vehicle excise duty with the Pre-Budget Report in November last year and took into account a range of factors before deciding to reduce VED on cars under 1100cc by £55.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80745]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* Much of this information is already available in Public Bodies 1998, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

The majority of public appointments are unpaid as most of those who accept a public appointment do so on a voluntary basis. The details of those appointments to public (and other) bodies that attract a fee or salary, which Treasury Ministers are responsible for, are as follows:

Public Bodies

Body	*Status*	*Appointment*	*Salary/fee*
Bank of England Court	Public Corporation	1 Chairman	£227,000 p.a.
		1 Deputy	£191,500 p.a.
		1 Member	£153,000 p.a.
		1 Member	£142,167 p.a.
		1 Member	£142,167 p.a.
		2 Members	£125,500 p.a.
		12 Members	£500 p.a.
Policyholders Protection Board	Executive NDPB	5 Members	£200 per day
Financial Services Tribunal	Tribunal NDPB	1 Chairman	£380 per day
		2 Members	£275 per day
Section 706 Tribunal	Tribunal NDPB	1 Chairman	£900 p.a.
		8 Members	£500 p.a.

Non-Public Bodies

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) Board consists of an Executive Chairman, two other Executives, one non-Executive Deputy Chairman and 10 other non-Executives. Salaries and fees are set by the FSA. The details of these are published in the Annual Report, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Euro

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what means he plans to enable businesses which wish to use the euro in Britain to do so; what estimate he has made of the cost of such measures; what plans he has to make it possible for businesses which wish to use other currencies to do so; and if he will make a statement. [80667]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* The introduction of the euro in 11 member states at the start of this year signalled a fundamental change in the business environment for UK firms. In recognition of this, the Government have taken a number of steps to facilitate UK business use of the euro. These steps are outlined in the regular Treasury report "Getting ready for the euro", copies of which are in the House Library.

Where there is demand, and where it is sensible, Government Departments and agencies already deal with UK firms in major foreign currencies.

New Bank Notes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how long it takes the Bank of England on average to set up and print a new bank note after the initial design is completed. [76194]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The set-up time from approval of note design to the issue of the note is dependent on the specification, the complexity and the required launch volumes. The duration of the origination and plate-making process, and the set-up and proof printing for the Bank of England and other Central Banks in general, is between four and five months. However, if the banknote contains features that require additional equipment, then the lead time of that equipment must be included. Specialist equipment lead times can be up to one year.

The actual printing can take up to eight months dependent on the number of notes required.

Euro Notes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the approximate number of each denomination of sample euro notes printed by the Bank of England. [76196]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The sample involved the Bank printing some 2 million each of the 20 and 50 euro notes and 5 million of the 5 euro note for pre-production trial purposes.

European Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee (1) Council working documents; [80542]

(2) unofficial texts of draft European legislation. [80549]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* HM Treasury receives a large volume of both official, unofficial and working texts during the course of negotiations on EU legislation. In order to facilitate the work of the European Scrutiny Committee, Explanatory Memorandums are often submitted on the basis of unofficial texts if an official text, formally circulated to Member States from the Council Secretariat, has not yet been received. HM Treasury keep the Committee informed of substantive progress in negotiations by supplementary Memoranda or Ministerial letter, sometimes accompanied by a draft text if appropriate. It would involve disproportionate cost to provide a definitive list of the unofficial draft documents made available to the Committee since 1 May 1997.

Euro Task Forces

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the criteria for selection of members of the euro task forces. [81046]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have consulted widely in taking forward euro preparations. For instance, in October 1997, the Chancellor set up a Business Advisory Group (BAG), headed by Lord Simon, to advise on the practical issues associated with UK membership. Representative organisations were invited to send their own nominated members.

Red Book Changes

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list and quantify the revisions/forecasting changes referred to in Table 2.5 of the Red Book. [80865]

Ms Hewitt: Revisions to the forecasts of government receipts and expenditure since the Pre-Budget Report are shown in tables B11 and B13 of the March 1999 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list and provide an explanation of the changes to the components of Annually Managed Expenditure referred to in paragraph 2.57 of the Red Book. [80859]

Mr. Milburn: Changes to the forecast of Annually Managed Expenditure since the Comprehensive Spending Review are listed and explained in paragraph 2.9 and table 2.2 of "Public Expenditure: Statistical Analyses 1999–2000" (Cm 4201), published in March 1999.

Government Debt

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total level of Government debt in cash terms in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01, *(f)* 2001–02, *(g)* 2002–03 and *(h)* 2003–04. [80889]

Ms Hewitt: The stock of public sector net debt at end-March 1997 is set out in the monthly Office for National Statistics First Release 'Public Sector Finances'. Estimates and projections of the stock of debt in subsequent years were published in table B8 of the March 1999 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Public Sector Finances

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the figures used in preparing Chart 2.4 of the Red Book on the basis of *(a)* per cent. of GDP and *(b)* cash terms; and if he will estimate the effect of the same assumptions on the public sector net cash requirement over the same periods. [80866]

Ms Hewitt: Figures used in Chart 2.4 as a per cent. of GDP can be found in Table 2.6 of the Red Book and are reproduced from 1990–91 onwards in the following table. Figures for the cautious case can be calculated by applying the ready reckoners set out in Table 3.1 of 'Fiscal policy: public finances and the cycle', published on 9 March alongside the Red Book. Figures can be converted to cash terms using money GDP figures from Table 2.1 of 'Economic Trends', published by the Office for National Statistics, and Table B4 of the Red Book.

The cyclical behaviour of the public sector net cash requirement matches (with opposite sign) that of the current budget. Figures for the cyclically adjusted public sector net cash requirement can thus be calculated by applying the difference between the actual and cyclically adjusted surplus on current budget to the public sector net cash requirement (set out in Tables B26 and B27 of the Red Book). Figures for the cautious case and in cash terms can be calculated by use of the methods set out.

Cyclically adjusted surplus on current budget, central case

	Per cent. of GDP
1990–91	–0.8
1991–92	–1.2
1992–93	–3.5
1993–94	–3.7
1994–95	–3.3
1995–96	–2.8
1996–97	–2.4
1997–98	–0.7
1998–99	0.2
1999–2000	0.6
2000–01	1.0
2001–02	1.1
2002–03	0.9
2003–04	1.0

Source:
Table 2.6 and Chart 2.4 of the Red Book

Engagements

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list his official engagements for 9 and 10 March. [80883]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I delivered the Budget statement in the House on 9 March. Over the two days referred to, I also had a number of meetings with ministerial colleagues and others.

European Central Bank

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *658*, on the European Central Bank, if he has been informed of the salary of the President of the Bank. [80396]

Ms Hewitt: No. As I set out in my answer to the right hon. Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean) on 17 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *658*, decisions on the terms and conditions of employment of the ECB Executive Board, including the President, are for the ECB. There is no obligation on members of the ECB Executive Board to reveal details of their terms and conditions of employment, including their salaries.

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80521]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *239–40*.

Teenage Pregnancies (Wales)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many births to girls conceiving under the age of 16 years there were in each local authority in Wales in each of the past 10 years. [81332]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 20 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on teenage births.

The numbers of girls who conceived at under age 16 and went on to a maternity are shown in the table. The areas shown for each of the years 1992–97 are the Welsh Unitary Authorities which were created in 1996. Information on a comparable basis is not readily available before 1992.

Conception by girls under 16 leading to maternity, Welsh Unitary Authorities, 1992–97

Unitary authority	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Blaenau Gwent	8	11	13	13	15	9
Bridgend	17	13	16	20	25	15
Caerphilly	27	27	25	36	33	31
Cardiff	30	26	18	38	37	37
Carmarthenshire	9	9	10	7	10	12
Ceredigion	3	1	3	0	0	5
Conwy	6	9	8	12	15	11
Denbighshire	5	6	8	4	8	7
Flintshire	8	14	9	10	12	10
Gwynedd	10	8	7	4	12	9
Isle of Anglesey	6	8	5	5	5	1
Merthyr Tydfil	15	11	14	12	6	9
Monmouthshire	5	2	4	6	9	3
Neath Port Talbot	7	11	6	21	9	10
Newport	15	17	23	14	14	19
Pembrokeshire	1	7	6	7	10	5
Powys	4	5	1	6	7	4
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	23	26	24	37	38	42
Swansea	11	14	18	25	31	30
Torfaen	9	9	17	11	17	9
The Vale of Glamorgan	9	4	12	10	11	16
Wrexhan	12	9	8	13	13	14
Wales	240	247	255	311	337	308

Premature Deaths (Wales)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many premature deaths there were in each local authority area in Wales in each of the past 10 years. [81337]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 20 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question asking how many premature deaths there were for each local authority in Wales in each of the past 10 years.

The information requested is given in the attached table.

Deaths for persons under 65 in Welsh unitary authorities, 1990–97

Unitary authority	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Blaenau Gwent	198	168	178	151	166	171	180	145
Bridgend	323	282	285	282	263	267	247	268
Caerphilly	358	358	378	373	365	359	386	352
Cardiff	649	602	577	623	576	582	540	574
Carmarthenshire	401	368	384	362	345	384	364	362
Ceredigion	116	131	128	129	122	151	115	113
Conwy	245	204	197	210	219	230	181	229
Denbighshire	181	178	179	186	182	180	197	192
Flintshire	305	299	314	320	302	274	289	273
Gwynedd	261	264	226	220	229	225	216	188
Isle of Anglesey	167	142	145	156	159	139	121	118
Merthyr Tydfil	146	157	130	149	145	130	158	152
Monmouthshire	148	142	149	145	146	145	150	156
Neath Port Talbot	325	321	327	321	329	305	337	290
Newport	313	303	308	317	284	262	268	294
Pembrokeshire	260	237	253	227	211	232	200	212
Powys	257	232	236	237	227	260	227	207
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	557	573	494	566	536	555	534	511
Swansea	501	478	474	497	447	481	415	473
Torfaen	213	202	189	213	206	195	180	180
The Vale of Glamorgan	231	218	209	226	229	196	209	218
Wrexham	269	234	256	286	252	264	267	254

Note:

Boundaries as constituted at 1 April 1996

Unemployment (Wales)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households without work for two years or more there were in each local authority in Wales in each of the past 10 years. [81336]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 20 April 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on workless households.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the ONS's major source of labour market data. Data by local authority area is not available on the combined economic activity of household members, and categories such as that requested, would undoubtedly be too small to identify at local authority level for both reliability and confidentiality reasons.

Household datasets are available for spring 1990, each spring quarter from 1992 to 1994 and spring and autumn quarters since spring 1995. An article was published in *Labour Market Trends* (January 1999 issue), a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library, giving a range of household data from the LFS using spring 1998 data. Table 8, on page 38, includes workless households by Government Office Region which may be of interest.

Single Currency

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the criteria to be used in determining whether the single currency is successful in accordance with paragraph 2.39 of the Red Book. [80858]

Ms Hewitt: A successful single currency will act as a complement to the Single Market. It will reduce transaction costs and exchange rate uncertainty on trade within the euro zone. It will make prices more transparent, boosting competition and providing new opportunities for companies to trade and invest. A successful single currency will also deliver its Treaty aims of price stability as a foundation for sustainable, non-inflationary growth.

WALES

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list all those task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 which have set up *(a)* sub-groups, *(b)* working parties and *(c)* other subsidiary committees; [79256]

(2) if he will list for all task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 *(a)* their dates of establishment, *(b)* those which have issued final reports and their dates of publication, *(c)* those which have been terminated and their dates of termination and *(d)* for those bodies still in existence, expected reporting and termination dates. [79279]

Mr. Michael: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House. In general, preparations for the advent of the National Assembly for Wales has led to a good deal of development work involving participants from business (employers and trade unions), local government and the voluntary sector. Generally, the groups which have been brought together to undertake this work have been short-term "task and finish" groups rather than formal bodies with sub groups or sub committees.

Small and Medium Businesses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he is taking to assist small and medium businesses; and if he will make a statement. [79844]

Mr. Hain: In line with the new economic agenda for Wales, Pathway to Prosperity, the Government are keen to secure a more dynamic and competitive business base in Wales. To this end increased resources—£83 million in 1999–2000—are being made available to back business development. This substantial budget will support a wide range of activity, including:

- increased resources for the TEC enterprise programme supporting over 1,000 new business starts; help for 2,000 firms to tackle the Millennium Bug issue; help for over 500 Sole Traders to take on their first employee; and assistance for over 2,000 firms in addressing skills development and other business growth issues.
- increased resources for Regional Selective Assistance which are expected to create or safeguard 12,000 jobs
- continuation of the Cymru Prosper Wales programme to help small firms benefit from the skills of graduates
- the expansion of the Innovation and Technology Counselling Service assisting some 3–4,000 firms
- the implementation of the Know-How initiative designed to help small and medium sized firms tap into the expertise of Welsh academic institutions.

In addition a new business-led Management Board—Business Connect Wales Ltd.—was established on 30 March to improve co-ordination of business support in Wales and to improve the operation of the Business Connect information, advice and support service.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Lobbyists

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list, including names and dates, of all meetings that *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his PPS have held during (i) 1997, (ii) 1998 and (iii) 1999 with people who work for political lobbying firms or for businesses that are members of the Public Relations Consultants Association. [79638]

Mr. Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*. When a PPS attends a meeting in an official or semi-official capacity he or she has to do so in accordance with the requirements of the Ministerial Code.

Euro Task Force

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the Euro Task Force for Wales to complete its work. [80085]

Mr. Michael: It is expected that the Task Force will complete its current role within the next six to nine months.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales from whom he sought advice on the appointment of the members of the Euro Task Force for Wales. [80083]

Mr. Michael: Advice on appointing the chairman and members of the Task Force was sought from a variety of organisations and individuals including the CBI and European Advisor to the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales from what budget the salary of Mr. J. Casterton, the Manager of the Euro Task Force for Wales, is paid. [80082]

Mr. Michael: Barclays Bank is paying the salary costs of Mr. John Casterton for the entire period of his secondment as Manager of the Euro Task Force for Wales.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the eligibility for Objective 2 and Objective 3 funding for Wales following the Berlin European Summit. [80235]

Mr. Hain: The agreements reached by Member States at the Berlin Summit provided an important step towards agreeing the whole Agenda 2000 package, including the new Structural Funds regulations. They represent a considerable success for the UK Government and its European partners after many months of hard negotiating. The agreements leave it open for the European Parliament to consider the whole package before the end of May.

Although the regulations are still in draft form the Government are eager to make progress in the designation of Objective 2 areas and is currently consulting across the UK on criteria to be adopted for their identification. Eligibility under the Community criteria can be for any type of area, industrial or service based, rural, urban or fisheries. The Regulations specify that 50 per cent. of the Objective 2 population should cover industrial or rural areas where these meet the relevant Community criteria.

All parts of the UK not receiving Objective 1 status will be eligible for Objective 3 funding.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations have taken place on the membership of, and appointments to, community health councils in Wales. [79884]

Mr. Michael: Members of the Community Health Councils (CHCs) whose terms of appointment were due to expire on 31 March 1999 have had their terms extended for one year in advance of the transfer of powers as this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly from 1 July. I announced proposals to develop a new and reinvigorated model of federated Community Health Councils on 15 March with a network of 28 Councils across Wales based on federations linked mainly to local authority areas.

I intend to meet representatives of CHCs to discuss the implementation of these proposals.

Complementary Medical Services

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on complementary medical services. [80840]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Government recognise that some people with conditions that do not respond to orthodox treatment can be helped by forms of complementary and alternative medicine and has sponsored research into the use of complementary medicine in general practice. GPs and hospital doctors may arrange for their patients to receive any of the complementary medicine treatments if they feel it is clinically necessary, and is the most appropriate method of treating the particular health need. The doctor should also take into account the patient's wishes, evidence of the safety and effectiveness of the treatment and its cost and availability locally.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Job Creation

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of new jobs created since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [80846]

Mr. Hain: Seasonally adjusted figures show that between March 1997 and December 1998 the number of employee jobs in Wales increased by 24,000 to 1,005,000.

Free Bus Travel

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales under what provision the National Assembly is given the power to introduce free bus travel for pensioners. [80511]

Mr. Michael: Following the transfer of powers, the National Assembly will be responsible for overseeing the administration of concessionary fares schemes operated by local authorities under the provisions of Part V of the Transport Act 1985. The nature of the schemes is at present a matter for local authority discretion, although the Government are committed to the introduction of legislation to set a minimum standard for pensioners travelling on buses. In the meantime, the Welsh Office has worked closely with local authorities and I have ensured that all authorities in Wales are in a position to operate schemes for pensioners which at least meet a minimum standard of a £5 bus pass entitling the holder to travel at half-fare. We are now working with local authorities and bus operators to prepare the way for the Welsh Assembly to support the introduction of free bus travel for pensioners over the next two to three years.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the funding for the scheme to provide free bus travel for pensioners will come from local authority funds. [80512]

Mr. Hain: At present it is for local authorities to make financial provision for their concessionary fares schemes from the resources available to them. I am currently consulting local authorities and bus operators on how best to implement free bus travel for pensioners, which I expect to see over the next two to three years. The method of funding the additional costs will be a matter for the National Assembly to determine.

Following the transfer of functions, the National Assembly will be responsible for overseeing the administration of concessionary fares schemes by local authorities.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what role the National Assembly will have in the operation of a scheme to provide free bus travel for pensioners. [80513]

Mr. Michael: Following the transfer of functions, the National Assembly will be responsible for overseeing the administration of concessionary fares schemes by local authorities in Wales.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times ministers in his Department met their counterparts in the US Administration between 1 January 1998 and 1 June 1998, indicating the dates and locations of each meeting, the ministers involved and the name of the US counterpart. [81081]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the first sentence of the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to his question, on 26 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *467*. In the period 1 January 1998 to 1 June 1998, these included the meeting between the then-President of the Board of Trade and Charlene Barshefsky, US Trade Representative, at the EU/US Summit in Birmingham on 18 May.

Libya

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to promote exports to and trade with Libya. [80806]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* Following the end of UNSC sanctions, I am considering a range of support for UK companies wishing to trade with Libya. Our response to the end of sanctions will be a positive one.

There remain issues to be resolved, including those arising from the WPC Fletcher case. We hope that these can be resolved successfully, so that we can move further towards restoring full diplomatic relations.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the benefits to British manufacturers of the ending of sanctions against Libya; and if he will make a statement. [80805]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* I believe there will be considerable commercial benefits to both Libya and the UK arising from the ending of UNSC sanctions. Libya has long been a traditional trading and investment partner of the UK in the Middle East. It is my hope that our long commercial history will give a sound foundation from which to re-build that relationship and restore Libya as one of our principle trading partners in the Middle East.

I also welcome the fact that many Libyans continue to look to the UK for education and training opportunities.

There is no doubt that Libya's economy is a large, diverse and sophisticated one which will offer many opportunities for the UK across a range of sectors.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will establish a one-stop-shop to provide information, advice and support to British companies wishing to trade with Libya. [80804]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The Department's trade desk for Libya will provide advice and support for British companies. Its contact details are:

Libya Trade Desk
Bay 413
Kingsgate House
66–74 Victoria Street
London
SW1E 6SW

Telephone: 0171 215 8216

Facsimile: 0171 215 4904.

Inquiries about the sectors covered by the recently suspended UNSC sanctions and EC Regulations should be directed to:

DTI Sanctions Licensing Unit

Telephone: 0171 215 8512

Facsimile: 0171 215 8386.

Inquiries about the impact of the suspension of sanctions in the financial sector should be addressed to:

Bank of England Sanctions Emergency Unit

Telephone: 0171 601 4607/4768

Facsimile: 0171 601 4309.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the hon. Member for West Derbyshire can expect a reply to his letter of 30 January and reminder of 9 March concerning the East Midlands Electricity Consumers' Council. [81444]

Mr. Battle: The correspondence to which the hon. Member refers was, of course, given full consideration as part of the Department's consultation on consumer councils for the utilities, along with many other submissions on this subject. As a matter of courtesy, following the recent publication of our response to the consultation, 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *263–67*, I am writing to the hon. Member in full explaining the situation.

US Trade Sanctions

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the total cost to United Kingdom businesses of lost exports as a result of the imposition of trade sanctions on British products by the Government of the United States of America. [79186]

Mr. Wilson: US Customs are currently withholding liquidation on some $500m-worth of EU export goods. The United States is likely to be given World Trade Organisation authority on 19 April to retaliate against $191.4m-worth of EU goods. The sectors that are expected to be included in this authorised retaliation, and the annual value of UK exports is as follows.

£ million

US tariff code	Description	US imports from UK 1997
	Total	26.8
85072080	Batteries	13.78
33073050	Bath Oils	7.29
49119120	Lithographs	2.20
63022190	Bed linen	1.48
48192000	Cartons	1.42
85167100	Coffee makers	0.37
42023210	Wallets	0.13
42022215	Handbags	0.09
48055000	Felt Paper	0.02

Source:
European Commission

It is difficult to say what the actual impact on the targeted sectors will be, as much will depend on how long any retaliatory measures remain in place, what steps were taken to bring forward orders from the US, and the ability of affected companies to find alternative customers for their goods. Some limited damage will have been caused to sectors which were on but have now been removed from the retaliatory list, due to the uncertainty caused in recent months. However, we believe that the Government's prompt response in offering a bond and duty guarantee scheme for the cashmere knitwear industry pre-empted the serious risk of severe and lasting damage being done to that industry.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he plans to announce measures to assist *(a)* the fine print industry and *(b)* other industries in respect of action taken by the US Government as a result of the banana dispute. [80023]

Mr. Wilson: The removal of some sectors from the US retaliation list on 9 April was welcome, but other sectors remain targeted, including lithographs. The Government brought forward a bond guarantee scheme in respect of cashmere knitwear in response to the particular circumstances of that industry, especially its highly seasonal nature. The need for the scheme has now been removed, and we have no plans to put in place something similar for other industries on the US list.

We now need urgent consultations with all the parties involved in the dispute on the options for reforming the banana regime, and on a solution that would avoid US retaliation taking effect.

European Scrutiny Committee

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 his Department has made available to the European Scrutiny Committee (1) Council working documents; [80547]

(2) unofficial texts of draft European legislation. [80550]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The Department receives a large volume of both official and unofficial/working texts during the course of negotiations on EU legislation. In order to facilitate the work of the European Scrutiny Committee and keep it informed of the progress of negotiations, the Department regularly submits Explanatory Memoranda to the Committee. It would involve disproportionate cost to provide a definitive list of the unofficial/working documents made available to the Committee since 1 May.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Council

14. **Dr. Stoate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Berlin European Council. [79958]

Mr. Robin Cook: At Berlin, we won a good deal for Britain.

For the first time, spending on the existing member states has been brought under strict control, with a lower ceiling for spending in the existing member states in 2006 than in 2000.

On agriculture, price cuts were agreed to bring milk, cereals and beef prices closer to world prices. A British family of four will benefit by £65 a year.

We won a good deal for UK regions.

The proportion of the UK living in regions covered by Objective 1 will increase by two-thirds and include for the first time Cornwall, West Wales & the Valleys and South Yorkshire.

And we have preserved the British abatement.

Kosovo

15. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Kosovo. [79959]

Mr. Robin Cook: I discussed developments in Kosovo with European counterparts at a Special General Affairs Council on 8 April. I am in regular contact with them, given the very grave nature of the situation in Kosovo.

Kosovo was also the main topic of discussion amongst EU Heads of Government at the European Council on 14 April.

28. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Foreign Minister of Russia regarding the situation in Kosovo. [79974]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been in regular contact with the Foreign Minister of Russia, Mr. Ivanov. He last spoke to him on 15 April.

35. **Ms Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet European counterparts to discuss developments in Kosovo. [79981]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given earlier today by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), *Official Report*, column 679.

Armenian Genocide

18. **Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to make a statement on the Armenian genocide. [79964]

Ms Quin: The British Government condemned the massacres of Armenians in Eastern Anatolia in 1915–16 at the time, and views the sufferings of the Armenian people then as a tragedy of historic proportions. But the British Government have not recognised the events of 1915–16 as a "genocide" a term which did not exist at the time and has no plans to make a statement.

European National Parliaments

22. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new steps he is taking to improve communication between the national parliaments of Europe. [79968]

Ms Quin: The Government strongly support improvements in communication between the national parliaments of Europe and between Westminster and the European Parliament.

In particular, the Government have recently extended the scheme which enables MPs to visit EU institutions so that it now includes visits to national parliaments of EU Member States. Such visits will complement the step change initiative which the Government have instigated in relations with our European partners.

In addition, our European embassies regularly advise and make arrangements for UK parliamentarians and Select Committees who wish to make contact with national parliamentarians across Europe.

The entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, with the Protocol on National Parliaments, on 1 May will further enhance the role of national parliaments in the EU.

Closer links between national parliaments improve knowledge and awareness of European issues in Westminster and enable Westminster's views to be heard more clearly across Europe.

Pakistan

24. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK relations with Pakistan. [79970]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The United Kingdom relations with Pakistan are long-standing and friendly. We have a continuing dialogue on a variety of issues of mutual concern.

Agenda 2000

25. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the negotiations on Agenda 2000 relating to enlargement. [79971]

Ms Quin: The settlement reached at Berlin on Agenda 2000 provides for the costs of enlargement to be met within the existing 1.27 per cent. GNP Own Resources ceiling. It therefore paves the way for enlargement. Substantial funds will be available to help prepare applicant counties for accession and to provide assistance after they join—£14.6 million (21.8 million euro) and £38.7 million (58.1 million euro) respectively over the next financing period 2000–06.

Colombia

26. **Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Colombian Government with regard to displaced people. [79972]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The British Government take every opportunity to raise the issue of displaced people, and human rights in general, with the Colombian Government at senior level. I have raised these issues on both of my visits to Colombia and regularly raise them with the Colombian Ambassador in London.

Middle East Peace Process

27. **Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the action proposed to be taken by the European Union as a result of the declaration on the middle east peace process at the Berlin European Council. [79973]

29. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the role of the EU in assisting a negotiated settlement in the middle east. [79975]

33. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the declaration on the middle east peace process at the Berlin summit. [79979]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer given earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), *Official Report*, column 690.

Iraq

30. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his oral answer of 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 869–70, on Iraq, if he will define the humanitarian objectives of the no-fly zones. [79976]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow is aware from the answer given to his question on 18 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *764*, by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), the No-Fly Zones were established in response to a situation of overwhelming humanitarian necessity. Coalition aircraft patrol the No-Fly Zones in support of SCR 688 which called on Iraq to end the repression of its civilian population. The humanitarian objective is therefore to limit this repression as far as possible. This remains a vital task, as the latest report from the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights makes clear, the Iraqi security services continue to persecute opponents of the regime on the ground. Without our continued presence in the No-Fly Zones, they would be free to do so from the air as well. With past atrocities committed by Iraqi forces in mind, including the chemical weapons attack on the Kurds in Halabjah, we are not prepared to countenance that.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the sanctions imposed by the international community on Iraq have affected the supply of radioactive isotopes for the treatment of cancer there. [80161]

Mr. Fatchett: We are not aware that sanctions have affected the supply of radioactive isotopes for the treatment of cancer in Iraq. Radioactive isotopes are included on the distribution plan for the present phase of the UN "oil for food" programme. We are not aware that any contracts for these isotopes have been put on hold or blocked in the UN Sanctions Committee.

European Commission

31. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the disciplinary procedures applicable to employees of the European Commission. [79977]

Ms Quin: I believe that a review of these procedures for disciplinary offences should form part of the Commission reform process. Effective arrangements must be put in place under which those who do not meet the standard required of European public servants can be disciplined and, if necessary, dismissed within a reasonable timescale.

European Union

32. **Ms Kelly:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts about institutional reform of the European Union. [79978]

Ms Quin: Heads of Government met Mr. Prodi, the European Council's nominee for Commission President, on 14 April to discuss Commission reform. They agreed to take forward the reform process at the European Council in Cologne on 3–4 June on the basis of more detailed plans drawn up by Mr. Prodi.

The timing of an Intergovernmental Conference to examine institutional reform prior to enlargement will be considered at the Cologne summit.

The Government are pushing for profound reform of the way in which the Commission works. We believe that the Commission should be guided by the principles of efficiency, transparency and accountability. Achieving this will require changes in financial control systems, personnel management and structures.

Nigeria

34. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with the new Government in Nigeria. [79980]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are working to build a strong relationship with President-elect General Olusegun Obasanjo, who will be sworn in to office on 29 May 1999.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met him in Nigeria shortly after the February Presidential elections. General Obasanjo subsequently visited London and had a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, which I attended. He also met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

BBC World Service

36. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the funding of the BBC World Service during *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [79982]

Ms Quin: Following the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review in July 1998, grant-in-aid to the BBC World Service was increased by £44.2 million to £175.5 million in 1999–2000, £174.0 million in 2000–01 and £177.7 million in 2001–02, a real increase of on average nearly 3.9 per cent. in each year above the 1998–99 level. This compares with a CSR increase for the FCO of around 2 per cent. per annum.

International Criminal Court

37. **Dr. Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress with the establishment of an international criminal court. [79983]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Eighty one States, including the UK, have signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court and two have ratified it. The first meeting of the Preparatory Commission for the Court took place in February; the next will begin on 26 July. The Government continue to lobby for international support for the Court, and are playing a full part in the work of the Preparatory Commission.

Corpus Juris

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had on corpus juris and if he will make a statement. [79951]

Kate Hoey: I have been asked to reply.

The research study entitled "Corpus Juris", published in 1997 under the aegis of the European Commission, contains proposals for common penal rules and procedures to protect the financial interests of the European Community, including the creation of an office of European Public Prosecutor.

The House of Lords European Communities Committee has recently conducted an inquiry into the Corpus Juris report. The Government provided both written and oral evidence to the inquiry and are awaiting the Committee's findings.

Although the Government fully share the objective of fighting fraud against the Community budget, we disagree with many of the recommendations of the "Corpus Juris" study. None of the recommendations have been submitted to the Council of Ministers, but if this were to happen, unanimous agreement would be needed for them to be adopted and come into effect. The Government's agreement to the majority of the proposals in their present form is highly unlikely.

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80523]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply to his question given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *239*.

Ambassadors for British Business

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the criteria for selection of Ambassadors for British business. [81038]

Mr. Fatchett: The Ambassadors for British Business were selected to represent a wide cross-section of British commercial success. They are people who frequently go abroad on working visits and have a wealth of specialist knowledge backed up by the excellent contracts. They include the chairmen and executives of multinationals as well as smaller concerns. They have been very successful in helping to promote the United Kingdom as a place to do business.

Papua New Guinea

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *61*, on Papua New Guinea, what issues were discussed with the High Commissioner at the meeting of 3 March; what actions were requested of Her Majesty's Government; and what commitments were made on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. [80878]

Mr. Fatchett: On 3 March, the Papua New Guinea High Commissioner telephoned officials at FCO. In line with Government practice, I cannot reveal the substance of an exchange conducted in confidence with a representative of a foreign government.

Chagos Islands

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to allow the Chagos islanders to visit their homeland; and if he will make a statement. [80803]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* Any person who wishes to visit the Chagos islands can apply for a permit to do so and each application will be considered on its merits.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the demand of the Chagos islanders to return to their homeland following the recent High Court ruling on this matter; and if he will make a statement. [80802]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The recent High Court ruling concerned an application for leave to apply for a Judicial Review. Leave was granted and in due course the case will be heard by the full Divisional Court. In the meantime, it will be inappropriate for the Government to comment further.

Libya

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Libyan Arab Jamahirya regarding the re-opening of a Libyan diplomatic mission in London; and if he will make a statement. [80809]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The re-opening of a Libyan diplomatic mission in London depends on the re-establishment of diplomatic relations which were broken off in 1984 after the shooting of WPC Fletcher outside the Libyan People's Bureau in London.

Following the handover of the two Lockerbie accused, there remain a number of other bilateral issues between Libya and ourselves. Foremost of these is the WPC Fletcher case.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends *(a)* to re-open the British Embassy in Tripoli and *(b)* to re-establish full diplomatic relations with Libya; and if he will make a statement. [80807]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The re-opening of the British Embassy in Tripoli depends on the re-establishment of diplomatic relations which were broken off in 1984 after the shooting of WPC Fletcher outside the Libyan People's Bureau in London.

Following the handover of the two Lockerbie accused, there remain a number of other bilateral issues between Libya and ourselves. Foremost of these is the WPC Fletcher case.

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken by the UK and the EU to implement the suspension of UN sanctions against Libya; and if he will make a statement. [81677]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: UN sanctions against Libya imposed by Security Council resolutions 748 and 883 were suspended on 5 April, in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1192 (1998), immediately the UN Secretary-General reported that the two Lockerbie accused had been delivered for trial before the Scottish court established in the Netherlands and that the Libyan Government had satisfied the French judicial authorities with regard to the bombing of UTA 772. The prohibition on payment of performance bonds in paragraph 8 of resolution 883 remains in operation.

The provisions of those resolutions were implemented in the UK by restrictions imposed in the Libya (United Nations Prohibition of Flights) Order 1992, The Libya (United Nations Sanctions) Order 1993, The Libya (United Nations Sanctions)(Channel Islands) Order 1993 and The Libya (United Nations Sanctions)(Isle of Man) Order 1993. In accordance with Article 1(2) of each Order its operation was accordingly suspended; Article 13 of the three 1993 Orders, which imposes restrictions on the payment of bonds given in respect of contracts whose performance had been affected by the suspended provisions of the Orders, and the provisions in those Orders relating to the enforcement of Article 13, remain in operation. Details of the suspension of UN sanctions and of the Orders have been published in a notice in the London Gazette on 12 April and the Edinburgh and Belfast Gazettes on 9 April. Action is in hand to gazette the suspension of the relevant provisions of the Orders implementing the UN sanctions in the Overseas Territories.

On 16 April, The Council of the EU adopted a Common Position (7318/99) suspending the measures taken against Libya by the EU in response to UN Security Council resolutions 748 and 883.

The Common Position also specified that the measures agreed by Member States in 1986 in response to Libya's general implication in terrorism should remain in force (these measures are an arms embargo; restrictions on the freedom of movement of Libyan diplomats and consular personnel; reduction of the staff of diplomatic and consular missions; and stricter visa requirements and procedures). The Common Position will be reviewed in the light of the UN Secretary-General's report on Libyan compliance with the remaining provisions of UN Security Council resolutions 731 and 748, in particular Libyan renunciation of terrorism.

The Common Position does not affect Regulation 3275/93 which prohibits the satisfying of claims with regard to contracts and transactions the performance of which was affected by UN sanctions.

Based on this Common Position, the EC adopted a Regulation suspending the application of Regulation 3274/93 which prevented the supply of certain goods and services to Libya.

In addition to the EU measures against Libya agreed in 1986, national controls on the supply of aircraft, aircraft parts and flight simulators to Libya under the provisions of Dual-Use and Related Goods (Export Control) Regulation 1996, as amended, remain in force.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will be issuing a press release on the suspension of EU sanctions against Libya.

Inward Investment

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the work he has done to secure *(a)* Japanese and *(b)* Korean inward investment into the United Kingdom. [81104]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The Invest in Britain Bureau (IBB) is jointly managed by the FCO and DTI. It has active promotion strategies aimed at securing the UK's position as the number one European location for Japanese and Korean investment. The IBB runs a programme of company visits (900 in Japan, 220 in Korea in 1998–99), promotional seminars, media campaigns and inward missions aimed at attracting inward investment, as well as working closely with existing investors alongside the UK Development Agencies.

The Ministerial teams in the FCO and DTI support this both here in the UK and when travelling overseas. For example, I have met a number of Japanese and Korean investors here and when visiting Japan and Korea.

Prime Minister (Foreign Media Articles)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what correspondence his *(a)* Department and *(b)* office have received from (i) posts abroad and (ii) the Prime Minister's office on placement of articles written by the Prime Minister in the foreign media, which would facilitate identification of those articles; and if he will make a statement. [81237]

Mr. Fatchett: We do not maintain the records necessary to provide a comprehensive answer. To do so would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Departmental Staff (Ethnic Origin)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide a breakdown, in numerical and percentage terms, of the ethnic origin, at 1 March, of *(a)* his private office, *(b)* Government special advisers, *(c)* his Policy Unit and *(d)* staff in total. [78513]

Mr. Nick Brown: *(a)* The composition of my Private Office on 1 March was as follows:

	Number	*Percentage*
White Origin	5	71.4
Ethnic minority origin	2	28.6

The figures quoted relate solely to my Private Office and do not cover the whole of the Secretariat in my Department.

(b) I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *39*.

(c) My Department does not have a separate Policy Unit.

(d) I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 31 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *710–11*.

New Forest (Hunting)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many videos his Department has received since 1 May 1997 depicting the activities of the New Forest hounds; and which Ministers have viewed them. [80435]

Mr. Morley: Since 1 May 1997, the Forestry Commission has received about a dozen videos of activities during fox hunts in the New Forest. I have seen some of these videos.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons it took from 1 June 1998, when the Forestry Commission approved a licence for New Forest fox hounds, until October 1998 for that licence to be issued. [80436]

Mr. Morley: The Forestry Commission issues licences for fox hunting over its land. The terms of those licences are based on an Agreement between the Commission and the Master of Foxhounds Association. The Agreement for last season was concluded on 18 August, after which the licences and associated maps were prepared in accordance with the Agreement. The Commission completed the New Forest Fox Hounds' licence on 24 September.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what involvement Ministers have in the procedure by which the Forestry Commission issue hunting licences in the New Forest; [80433]

(2) what involvement Ministers have in the process of issuing a hunting licence once the Forestry Commission have approved the terms of such a licence. [80434]

Mr. Morley: None. The Forestry Commission does, however, keep Ministers informed about its policies on hunting and the terms of the licences that it issues.

Advisory Committees

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those members of advisory committees to his Department who have declared outside interests with *(a)* DiaDexus, *(b)* Cerebrus Ltd, *(c)* Cerebrus PLC, *(d)* Stanford University, *(e)* Human Genome Services Inc, *(f)* Glaxo Wellcome, *(g)* the Wellcome Institute, *(h)* Monsanto, *(i)* AgrEvo and *(j)* SmithKline Beecham. [80129]

Mr. Morley: The following members of advisory committees have declared relevant outside interests as listed below:

Advisory Committee	*Member*	*Declared interest*
Veterinary Products Committee	Mr. J. M. Jepson	Glaxo Wellcome, SmithKline Beecham
	Dr. D. F. Wishart	SmithKline Beecham
Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee	Dr. Peter Goodfellow	SmithKline Beecham
	Prof. Roy Anderson	The Wellcome Trust
	Prof. John Collinge	The Wellcome Trust
Farm Animal Welfare Council	Dr. Agnes Winter	Glaxo Wellcome

Declared interest is in Wellcome Trust—not Wellcome Institute.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total payment for land put into set-aside in England and Wales in 1998. [80905]

Mr. Rooker: At 31 March, £75,589,275 had been paid on land set aside in 1998 under the Arable Area Payments Scheme in England and Wales.

Genetically Modified Food

Ms Drown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the safety of the antibiotic-resistant gene in Novartis's genetically modified maize; [80794]

(2) what assessment the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes made of the safety of the antibiotic-resistant gene in Novartis's genetically modified food. [80793]

Mr. Rooker: The conclusions of the Advisory Committee on Novel Food and Processes (ACNFP) concerning this GM maize are recorded in the Committee's 1996 annual report which is available in the House of Commons Library. The ACNFP was satisfied that processed food ingredients derived from the maize were as safe as their conventional counterparts but expressed reservations about the use of the unprocessed maize as an animal feedingstuff because of what it considered to be a small, but finite, chance that this could lead to a transfer of antibiotic resistance.

Subsequent to the ACNFP's consideration of this matter, this maize was assessed by three EC Scientific Committees, the Scientific Committee for Foods, the Scientific Committee for Plants and the Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition, who took into account the ACNFP's views. Whilst agreeing with the ACNFP's assessment that there was a finite risk of the transfer of antibiotic resistance to cattle fed on the raw maize, all three EC Committees felt that this was too small to warrant recommending a ban on its use for animal feed. EC approval was therefore granted. The Department has however commissioned some research work at the University of Leeds to look further into the issue of the potential for the transference of antibiotic resistance from GM crops. Should any scientific evidence emerge from this which in the opinion of the ACNFP shows the risk to be greater than originally thought, the Government will consider taking action under the safeguard clause in the EC Deliberate Release Directive (90/220) to restrict the use of the raw maize in animal feed and press for an urgent reappraisal of the situation by the EC Scientific Committees and the Council.

Synthetic Pyrethroids

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies he has carried out to determine the period which elapses before a river or stream's insect life recovers to its former levels after pollution by synthetic pyrethroids. [80875]

Mr. Rooker: All veterinary medicines and pesticides, including those containing synthetic pyrethroids, must satisfy statutory criteria including safety. The safety assessment includes safety to the environment. Pollution incidents should not occur if safety warnings on labels are heeded. The period of recovery after a pollution incident is a matter for the environment agencies but is likely to vary according to the conditions in the river or stream concerned.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the result of studies he has carried out into the effect of synthetic pyrethroids in *(a)* sheep dips and *(b)* sprays for plants on (1) aquatic insects, (2) soil invertebrates and (3) other animal life; what sums he has expended in each of the last five years on such studies; and what further work is being carried out to determine the effect on fish life in affected rivers and streams. [80874]

Mr. Rooker: No veterinary medicine is authorised unless it satisfies statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Safety includes safety to the environment. As part of the process of approval, the applicant company is required to submit data to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate where they are carefully assessed by specialists qualified in various scientific disciplines including ecotoxicology. No studies are carried out by the Ministry.

All pesticides are similarly subject to strict statutory control. In considering the approval or review of a pesticide, an assessment is made (on the basis of data

supplied by the applicant) of the risk to people, wildlife and to the wider environment. Only if this assessment shows that there is no unacceptable risk will approval be granted or allowed to continue following a review. The Ministry has carried out no studies of the kind specified into the environmental effects of synthetic pyrethroid pesticides. However, synthetic pyrethroid pesticides have been used in other MAFF funded research.

Seals

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the quantities of fish eaten by seals in the waters of the United Kingdom annually. [80871]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 17 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *574*.

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80759]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* "Public Bodies 1998"—copies of which are available in the Library of the House—provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which my Department is responsible. Some public appointments, however, are unpaid as many of those who accept public appointment do so on a voluntary basis.

Fisheries Agreements

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which African countries, other than Mauritania, British fishing vessels, British flagged fishing vessels and British registered companies have fisheries interests. [81086]

Mr. Morley: There are no UK vessels currently fishing in the waters of African countries.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which *(a)* British fishing vessels, *(b)* British flagged fishing vessels and *(c)* British registered companies have a beneficial interest in the fisheries agreement with Mauritania. [81085]

Mr. Morley: There are no UK vessels currently fishing in Mauritanian waters under the EU fisheries agreement.

Sand Eels

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies his Department has carried out to determine the importance of sand eels as the prey of *(a)* salmon smelts and *(b)* sea trout smelts; and what was the conclusion of such studies. [80876]

Mr. Morley: No such studies have been carried out by the Department.

Seed Certification

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he plans to grant any more applications for provisional seed certification under the non-statutory seed certification scheme. [81263]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* A number of applications in England and Wales for provisional seed certification under the non-statutory seed certification scheme are being processed through the current growing season. However, the Government will come forward quickly with proposals to amend secondary seeds legislation before the next round of applications are made. If these measures are adopted, there would be no need for the non-statutory scheme to continue.

Pork Imports

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has received on the compatibility with Article 36 of the Treaty establishing the European Union of placing restrictions on the import of pork products not produced to UK standards. [81364]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* In certain circumstances Article 36 of the Treaty allows the maintenance of restrictions on the free movement of goods where these can be justified for the protection of the health and life of humans or animals or on grounds of public morality or policy. However, it is clear from Rulings by the European Court of Justice that we cannot use Article 36 of the Treaty to impose higher UK standards on imports where EU law has been harmonised as it has been in the field of farm animal welfare. Nor is it relevant to the UK ban on the use of Meat and Bone Meal (MBM) in animal feed as this ban is not in place because there is a known health risk to humans or animals in feeding MBM to pigs or poultry. The jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice also precludes reliance on the grounds of public morality or policy in the circumstances with which the hon. Member is concerned.

Organic Aid Scheme

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect on the amount of grant made under the organic aid scheme of recent changes in the definition of unimproved land for the purposes of the scheme. [81272]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* The amount of aid granted under the Organic Farming Scheme will be dependent on the number of applications and the type of land involved. We expect demand to be strong.

Rivers (Over-fishing)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what powers he has to limit the over-fishing of rivers; what discussions he has had with fishing clubs and river authorities about over-fishing of elvers and salmon; and if he will make a statement. [81261]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* The Environment Agency, which is responsible for the management of inland fisheries in England and Wales, has powers to make byelaws to regulate fishing for salmon and eels including elvers. It can also make net

limitation orders to limit numbers of net licences in salmon net fisheries. Both byelaws and net limitation orders must be confirmed by Ministers.

Following advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) that extreme caution should be exercised in the management of multi-sea-winter salmon and that the level of exploitation should be significantly reduced in 1999, the Environment Agency proposed the introduction of byelaws to reduce exploitation of spring salmon by both nets and rods in England and Wales. There was extensive consultation on these proposals including advertising in local and national press. The byelaws were confirmed, with modifications, on 14 April.

The Environment Agency and the Ministry have recently commissioned research into the state of eel and elver stocks and levels of exploitation. In addition, the independent group established by Ministers to review all aspects of salmon and freshwater fisheries legislation is considering whether the additional powers are needed to regulate fishing for salmon and eels. The group is expected to report to Ministers in the autumn.

Free-range Hens

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's definition of free-range hens. [81270]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* I assume that the hon. Member is referring to free-range egg production from hens. Before eggs can be marketed as free-range, EU Commission Regulations require, among other things, that the hens have continuous daytime access to open air runs, mainly covered with vegetation. They also specify maximum outdoor and indoor stocking densities.

Goats and Sheep

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to prevent the illegal slaughtering of goats and sheep, involving the removal of hides by oxyacetylene blowtorches; and if he will make a statement. [81394]

Mr. Rooker: The Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 (as amended) which implement the EC Fresh Meat Directive (64/433/EEC as amended) in Great Britain, make it an offence for any person to sell for human consumption fresh meat which has not been produced under veterinary supervision in licensed premises.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) will investigate any allegations relating to the illegal production of singed sheep and goat carcases, commonly known as 'smokies'. Where there is sufficient evidence that such activity has taken place, and it is in the public interest to do so, MAFF will prosecute those involved, in co-operation with Local Authority Environmental Health Departments as appropriate.

Pesticides

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will require the Advisory Committee on Pesticides to take account of the effects on biodiversity in reaching decisions about the clearance of pesticides. [81449]

Mr. Rooker: The remit of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides is to give advice to Ministers, either when requested to do so or otherwise, on any matters relating to the control of pests in furthering the general purposes of Part III of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. These purposes include

"the continuous development of means ... to safeguard the environment ...".

The Committee's members include people with expertise in environmental matters.

All pesticides are approved on the basis of a thorough evaluation of the risk that they pose in use. No pesticide may be used unless Ministers, advised by the Committee, have given approval to that use. When considering whether to recommend that a pesticide should be approved by Ministers, the Committee will take into account, amongst other things, the possible effects of that pesticide on non-target wildlife and the environment. If the risk is considered to be too great, then no approval is recommended.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the compatibility of his plan to limit charges for stakeholder pensions with the need for those purchasing such pensions to be given proper advice. [81114]

Mr. Timms: We recognise that proper information and advice for those who need it will be an important part of the decision-making process for individuals considering a stakeholder pension scheme.

Details of the minimum standards for stakeholder pensions are subject to further consultation. The standards will include a limit on the level of charges, and in setting that limit we shall consider carefully what allowance should be made for the costs of information and advice.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the implications of the growing use of tracker pension funds for the economy; and what account he has taken of such an assessment in designing his stakeholder pension scheme. [81113]

Mr. Timms: No such assessment has been made. We expect that stakeholder pension schemes will, like other pension schemes, have the option of investing in tracker funds.

Fraud Investigation

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the result of his Department's investigation into the nature and extent of identity fraud. [81092]

Mr. Timms: The best available measure of the scale of Identity Fraud is provided by the Department's measurement regime (Benefit Reviews). The second

Income Support review recorded the level of ID fraud at between 1 per cent. and 9 per cent. of the stock of fraud. This translates to between £17.5 million and £154 million.

Initial characteristics of an Identity Fraudster were identified and further research was proposed to refine these characteristics further. This is a valuable line of inquiry since if the characteristics of an Identity Fraudster can be established, then we can enhance our ability to prevent, detect and target resources at identity fraud.

The Identity Fraud Management Unit has now been incorporated within the Benefits Agency Security and Investigation Service (BASIS), the organised and serious fraud investigation service, who have extensive intelligence and experience in dealing with Identity related benefit crime.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps have been taken towards establishing a criminal intelligence database for fraud investigation in the Benefits Agency and local authorities. [81090]

Mr. Timms: The Benefits Agency Security and Investigation Service (BASIS) uses an intelligence database to record all operational intelligence relating to investigations. BASIS liaises with the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (BFIS) and local authorities and is developing further its interchange and use of intelligence for investigative purposes with BFIS and local authorities.

Pensioners (Minimum Income)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people who will benefit as a result of the new guaranteed minimum income for pensioners on income support. [80948]

Mr. Timms: The number of pensioner benefit units that will benefit from the Minimum Income Guarantee for pensioners in 1999–2000 is estimated to be 1.47 million. A pensioner benefit unit represents a single person aged 60 or over, or a couple where one or both members is aged 60 or over.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and exclude pensioners in residential care and nursing homes.

2. The estimates are based on forecasts published in the March 1999 Departmental Report.

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80522]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *23*.

Pensioners (Benefits)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the increase in take-up of *(a)* income support and *(b)* other benefits among people of pensionable age since 1 May 1997. [80947]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is currently unavailable. Estimates of take-up are published annually for Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Family Credit. The statistics for the year 1997–98 are in the process of being compiled and will be published later this year.

Incapacity Benefit

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving incapacity benefit in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the West Midlands on 31 March. [81162]

Mr. Bayley: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table. Figures for 31 March 1999 are not yet available.

Incapacity Benefit recipients

	31 August 1998
United Kingdom	1,716,488
(Northern Ireland)	98,588
(Great Britain)	1,617,900
West Midlands	141,680

Note:
Both systems exclude a small number of cases held clerically

Source:
Norther Ireland: 100 per cent. sample of the Benefit computer system
Great Britain and West Midlands: 5 per cent. sample of the Benefit computer system

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Lifelong Learning

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures the Government are undertaking to promote lifelong learning and develop the skills base of older workers as a means of improving the levels of employment among the over 50s. [80946]

Mr. Mudie: The Government believe that lifelong learning contributes to national competitiveness, personal prosperity and to the development of a fair and harmonious society. The aim is to develop a "learning society" in which everyone regularly updates their skills and knowledge throughout life. Action to improve learning opportunities for the over 50s is an important part of our approach to "Better Government For Older People".

Measures to promote lifelong learning and develop the skills base of older workers include: extending student loans to those aged 54, opportunities through the £15 million Adult and Community Learning Fund; access to Learning Direct and Career Development Loans; and opportunities through work based learning for adults, the New Deals and Employment Zones. In addition, the New Deal for the over 50s who are out of work for six months or more and are on income replacement benefits, and their dependent partners, announced in the budget, includes plans for a learning support of up to £750 for each person.

New Deal (Disabled People)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many organisations for disabled people have received New Deal funding. [80890]

Ms Hodge: The information requested is not available in the form requested. However, under the New Deal for Disabled People, 22 of 24 Innovative Schemes involve organisations of or for disabled people. In addition, all the consortium contracted to deliver the second group of six Personal Adviser Service pilot areas also involve such organisations.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many consortiums led by disabled people received New Deal funding during the second tranche. [80891]

Ms Hodge: Under the New Deal for Disabled People, all six contracts awarded in the second tranche of the Personal Adviser Service and 13 of the 14 contracts awarded under the second tranche Innovative Schemes are two consortiums that include organisations of or for disabled people. Two Personal Adviser consortiums and seven Innovative Schemes are led by voluntary sector organisations.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average length of time spent on the Gateway of the New Deal for 18 to 25-year-olds by those *(a)* with no educational qualifications, *(b)* with Foundation Level qualifications, *(c)* with NVQ Level 1, *(d)* with NVQ Level 2, *(e)* with NVQ Level 3, *(f)* with NVQ Level 4, *(g)* with other qualifications and *(h)* who did not list any educational qualifications. [81108]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information set out in the following table shows the average length of time spent on the New Deal Gateway by qualification level, for those young people who had left the Gateway by the end of January 1999.

Highest qualification held	*Average length of time spent on Gateway (in days)*
NVQ/SVQ Level 4+ or equivalent	87
NVQ/SVQ Level 3 or equivalent	92
NVQ/SVQ Level 2 or equivalent	91
NVQ/SVQ Level 1 or equivalent	95
NVQ/SVQ Foundation Level or equivalent	98
Other	92
None	100
Those who did not list qualifications	68

Gambling (Young People)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action his Department is taking to combat gambling by young people; and if he will make a statement. [80907]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Schools have an important role to play in helping to equip young people with the skills and knowledge they will require now and in later life. They are required to provide a curriculum which promotes the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development of pupils and to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. Schools take these legal responsibilities concerning the curriculum very seriously. Many schools choose to meet them through programmes of personal, social and health education which can encompass a broad range of topics, including the dangers of gambling.

Out-of-school Education

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he has issued revised guidance on the education of children out of school, including pupil referral units, following his consultation. [81191]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The consultation on the draft 'Social Inclusion: Pupil Support' guidance, which covers advice on education out of school including pupil referral units, ended on 31 March. We are now considering the responses and intend to issue the final version before the summer break.

SCOTLAND

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list for all task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 *(a)* their dates of establishment, *(b)* those which have issued final reports and their dates of publication, *(c)* those which have been terminated and their dates of termination and *(d)* for those bodies still in existence, expected reporting and termination dates; [79281]

(2) if he will list all those task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 which have set up *(a)* sub-groups, *(b)* working parties and *(c)* other subsidiary committees. [79258]

Mr. Dewar: The information requested is provided in the following table.

Title	*Date of establishment*	*Date of termination*	*Expected date of termination where known*	*Final report published*	*Expected report date where known*
(a) Task forces					
Joint COSLA/Scottish Office Best Value Task Force	May 1997		Summer 2000		Summer 1999
Prestwick Task Force	June 1997	December 1998		December 1998	
Action Group on Standards in Scottish Schools	July 1997				
Joint COSLA/Scottish Office Working Group on Council Tax Collection	March 1998		September 1999		July 1999
Task Force to Follow the Outcome of the Review of Protection Orders made under the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976	June 1998				
Coronary Heart Disease Task Force	July 1998		July 2000		July 2000
Borders Working Party	September 1998	March 1999		March 1999	

Title	Date of establishment	Date of termination	Expected date of termination where known	Final report published	Expected report date where known
(b) Policy reviews					
Scottish Homes' Support for Owner Occupation	June 1997	—	—	—	—
Scottish Homes' Support for Social Rented Housing	June 1997	—	—	—	—
Review of the Scottish Water Industry	June 1997	—	—	—	—
Review of the Processing of Cases in the Children's Hearings System	July 1997	—	—	—	—
Review to Identify Areas of Scotland Appropriate for Designation as National Parks	September 1997	—	—	—	—
Review of Countryside Access Legislation in Scotland	October 1997	—	—	—	—
Review into the System of Land Ownership and Management in Scotland	October 1997	—	—	—	—
Scottish Interdepartmental Review of the Treatment of Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses	October 1997	October 1998	—	November 1998	—
A Review of Aspects of Gaelic Broadcasting	December 1997	June 1998	—	May 1998	—
Review of Community Disposals and the use of Custody for Women Offenders in Scotland	December 1997	May 1998	—	May 1998	—
Review of Rural Water and Sewerage Grant Scheme	January 1998	—	—	—	Summer 1999
National Review of Health Resource Allocation	January 1998	—	June 1999	—	June 1999
Review of SSSIs in Scotland	February 1998	—	—	—	Summer 1999
Review of Community Education	February 1998	—	—	—	—
Review of Public Health Legislation	February 1998	—	—	—	—
Review of EA and SEPA Environmental Legislation (with DETR)	May 1998	—	Late 1999	—	End 1999
Strategic Study of Organic Wastes to Land	May 1998	October 1998	—	October 1998	—
Review of the Law and Practice of Compulsory Purchase and Land Compensation (with DETR)	June 1998	—	—	—	1999
Review of Domestic Violence	June 1998	—	—	—	—
Review of Public Health Function	Summer 1998	—	—	—	Summer 1999
HIV Health Promotion Review Group	August 1998	—	—	—	Spring 1999
Learning Disability Review	October 1998	—	—	—	December 1999
Committee on Review of Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984	December 1998	—	—	—	Summer 2000
Lord MacLean's Committee on Serious Violent and Sexual Offenders	January 1999	—	—	—	2000

One or more sub-groups have been set up

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Direct Labour Organisations

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by authority and service area the surpluses and deficits recorded in Scottish local authority direct labour or service organisations audited accounts for 1995–96. [81369]

Mr. McLeish: I have arranged for a detailed list, provided by the Accounts Commission for Scotland, of the audited surpluses and deficits achieved by direct labour and direct service organisations of Scottish local authorities in 1995–96 to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Genetically Modified Salmon

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what estimate he has made of the number of genetically modified salmon presently being farmed; [81448]

(2) how many genetically modified salmon he estimates have escaped from farms into the environment. [81447]

Mr. Macdonald: No genetically modified salmon are currently farmed in Scotland. A three-year land-based trial project was licensed in 1995, but this was terminated early. There were no escapes.

As from 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

HEALTH

South-west Health Authorities (Funding)

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes have been made to the way money is allocated to health authorities and NHS trusts in Devon and Cornwall; and on what basis changes were calculated. [74431]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* A weighted capitation formula is used to calculate fair share targets of available resources.

Three changes were made to the hospital and community health services formula for 1998–99:

(a) the additional need weightings were applied to 100 per cent. of expenditure;

(b) the number of staff market forces factor payzones was reduced from 61 to 51;

(c) an adjustment was introduced to take the geographical cost variation of providing emergency ambulance services into account.

These changes were carried out under the auspices of the Resource Allocation Group (RAG). RAG published their 1997 report in February 1998.

From 1999–2000, health authorities received unified allocations covering:

(a) hospital and community health services;

(b) general practice infrastructure; and

(c) prescribing.

Three changes were made to the formula for 1999–2000:

(a) the adjustment for age in the hospital and community health services component was updated;

(b) a new additional need adjustment for prescribing was introduced;

(c) a monetary adjustment was introduced for the extra costs of interpretation, advocacy and translation services for ethnic minority populations.

These changes were based on research conducted under the auspices of the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation, the successor body to RAG. The committee will publish their 1998 annual report shortly.

We do not make revenue allocations direct to National Health Service trusts. NHS trusts receive most of their income through agreements with health authorities and their primary care groups.

Herbal Medicines

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions in the last 12 months the Medicines Control Agency has taken action to commence the process of removing from the market products which it accepts as safe but which it considers to be unlicensed herbal medicines requiring a product licence. [79486]

Ms Jowell: The Medicines Control Agency cannot accept that a herbal medicine is definitively safe unless this has been proven through the licensing process. The MCA is bound to ensure, in accordance with the law, the withdrawal of all unlicensed herbal medicines which are not exempt from licensing. In the past 12 months, except for the two occasions when immediate removal on safety grounds has been effected, compliance with the law has been achieved without the need for the MCA to enforce immediate removal of a herbal medicine from the market.

Nurses (Training)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department plans to make available (i) in East Sussex and (ii) nationally to support the training of nurses. [79489]

Mr. Denham: The Sussex Education Consortium, which covers East and west Sussex, plans to spend £16.5 million on the pre and post-registration education and training of nurses, midwives and health visitors in the 1999–2000 financial year. Consortia, nationally, plan to spend £513 million on nursing and midwifery training in 1999–2000.

Viagra

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make a statement on his policy proposals for the provision of Viagra by the NHS following the completion of his public consultation exercise. [80662]

Mr. Denham: The period of consultation ended on 25 March and work is now under way to collate the responses. We will make an announcement once we have had the opportunity to consider carefully all comments received during the consultation period.

Cardiac Surgery (North Staffordshire)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the *(a)* average waiting time and *(b)* number of patients on the waiting list for cardiac surgery at the North Staffordshire hospital. [80585]

Mr. Denham: On 31 December 1998, there were 411 patients waiting for cardiothoracic surgery at North Staffordshire Hospital National Health Service Trust, and they had been waiting for an average of 5.95 months. All urgent patients are currently being treated within four months.

Source:

Korner—December 1998.

Biggleswade and Steppingley Hospitals

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the projected expenditure in mid-Bedfordshire for 1998–99 on care for the elderly in Biggleswade and Steppingley hospitals; and what is the projected cost per head. [80478]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the retention and expansion of existing services and the development of new services, by the three relevant primary care groups, in relation to Biggleswade and Steppingley hospitals; [80457]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of costs in relation to the services currently provided at Biggleswade and Steppingley Hospitals; [80490]

(3) what assessment he has made of the financial impact on *(a)* Bedford Hospital and *(b)* other local acute hospitals of the (i) maintenance and (ii) development of services at Biggleswade and Steppingley Hospitals; [80447]

(4) what assessment he has made of the consultation process on the review of Biggleswade and Steppingley Hospitals; [80446]

(5) if he will assess the views of *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* consultants and *(c)* other healthcare professionals towards the retention and development of continuing care facilities at Biggleswade and Steppingley hospitals; [80475]

(6) if he will conduct *(a)* an audit of current provision of care and *(b)* a health needs assessment in relation to the review of Biggleswade and Steppingley Hospitals; [80491]

(7) what estimate he has made of the projected income which would result from the sale of the Biggleswade and Steppingley Hospital sites; [80489]

(8) if he will make a statement on progress in the review of acute care in Bedfordshire and the extent to which it informs the review of intermediate care; [80474]

(9) what assessment he has made of the Option 9 proposals for Biggleswade and Steppingley hospitals in relation to the Government's *(a)* medium and *(b)* long-term plans for developing the NHS; [80480]

(10) what assessment he has made of the basis for Bedford Hospital NHS Trust's support for the withdrawal of services from Biggleswade and Steppingley Hospitals; [80483]

(11) what assessment he has made of the prospects for using the Biggleswade and Steppingley hospital sites as part of the healthy living centre programme. [80461]

Mr. Denham: It is the responsibility of health authorities and primary care groups to assess the health care needs of their population, to draw up strategies and commissioning plans and to secure a range of hospital and community health services to meet those needs.

I understand that the health authority has conducted a consultation exercise into the development of intermediate care services. However, I understand that no proposals for change have yet been made. If proposals for significant change are made, and if the Community Health Council contests the health authority's proposals, following consultation, the matter would be referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for a decision. We would consider all the views expressed during the consultation prior to making any decision.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons Bedfordshire Health Authority has employed a consultant in connection with the review of Biggleswade and Steppingley hospitals. [80459]

Mr. Denham: It is a matter for Bedfordshire Health Authority to decide whether or not it requires the use of consultancy services. I understand that consultancy services were used to carry out the third phase of the review process.

Medical Negligence

Jacqui Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical negligence claims have (i) been brought and (ii) been successful against NHS practitioners in each of the last five years. [80648]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested.

Neurological Conditions

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the National Performance Framework on access to services for patients with neurological conditions. [80594]

Mr. Denham: A revised copy of the National Health Service Performance Assessment Framework document, reflecting comments received, was published on 8 April 1999. The associated high level performance indicator set is expected to be published later in the year alongside the Clinical Indicators. It is likely that a refined version of the "Discharge home within 56 days of emergency admission from home with a stroke" indicator will appear in both the amended set of Clinical Indicators and the high level performance indicators supporting the Performance Assessment Framework.

The high level performance indicators will continue to develop over time to ensure they focus on the outcomes that matter most to the patients and the public.

British Child Migrants

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Support Fund for the Former British Child Migrants to become operational; how the fund will be administered; what conditions will apply to determine who will be eligible to receive funding; and when the central information index and website will become operational. [81074]

Mr. Hutton: The Child Migrant Support Fund became operational from 1 April 1999. It is administered by International Social Service (ISS) on behalf of the Department. Applications to the Fund must be made through the relevant national ISS office, which will process the claims, but decisions on applications will be made by ISS United Kingdom.

In order to receive assistance from the Fund, the applicant must be able to show that he/she is a former British child migrant who does not have the means to fund his/her own arrangements for a first-time reunion with a close family member (mother, father, parents' siblings, or their own brothers and sisters).

The central information Index is expected to become operational in the autumn. The website has been operational since 1 March 1999.

Hospital Meals

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy on charging patients for their meals *(a)* in National Health Service hospitals and *(b)* in publicly funded nursing homes. [81145]

Mr. Denham: National Health Service patients are not charged for their meals whilst in hospital. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 16 July 1998 that there would be no new NHS patient charges in the lifetime of this Parliament, and this included payment for meals.

Individuals placed by local authorities in residential care homes or nursing homes are expected to contribute to the costs of their care package, subject to a means test. This care package includes accommodation and meals.

Multiple Sclerosis

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to health authorities about the criteria for NHS prescriptions for the drug Aricept. [81168]

Mr. Denham: In April 1998, we sent health authorities guidance from the Standing Medical Advisory Committee on the use of donepezil (Aricept). Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Sexual Health

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to set up the working party on sexual health strategy. [81070]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* Preliminary consultations to develop a sexual and reproductive health framework are currently under way. An announcement on the composition of a small external reference group will be made shortly.

NHS Investment (Pensioners)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what ways the £21 billion of extra investment in the NHS will be targeted on improving healthcare provision among those of pensionable age. [80942]

Mr. Hutton: The £21 billion extra investment in the National Health Service will mainly be distributed through general allocation. People aged 65 and over account for approximately 41 per cent. of total expenditure on hospital and community health services, although they make up 16 per cent. of the total population, and therefore will benefit significantly from this new investment.

Eye Test Charges

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of people who will benefit from the abolition of eye test charging for the over 60s. [80943]

Mr. Denham: We estimate that from 1 April 1999 some 6 million to 7 million more people aged 60 and over became eligible for free National Health Service sight tests.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 298–99, on the Private Finance Initiative, if the contracts for the schemes which have reached financial closure contain any provision for monitoring as to whether they will be completed on time. [81367]

Mr. Denham: All the contracts for the major private finance initiative schemes which have reached financial close contain provisions which enable monitoring whether the scheme will be completed on time.

CABINET OFFICE

Annual Reports

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many annual reports were produced by *(a)* Government departments, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies, and at what total cost, in the last year for which figures are available. [80857]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Information on the number and cost of annual reports is not held centrally. However, as a general rule, each of the 19 principal government departments and 135 executive agencies produces its own annual report, as do the vast majority of over 300 executive NDPBs. Smaller departments and advisory NDPBs either produce their own annual report or include information on their annual activities in a joint report or in the report of a parent department. Copies of all annual reports are available to Members from the Libraries of the House.

Modernising Government Logo

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office which organisations were approached to submit a tender for the contract to produce the Modernising Government logo; and where the tender for the contract was advertised. [80880]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The procurement of the design of the Modernising Government logo was organised and managed by the Central Office of Information (COI) on behalf of the Cabinet Office. The contract was not advertised.

Three design houses with a good track record of design on behalf of Government were chosen and invited to submit tenders. The design houses were Interbrand Newell and Sorrell, Pentogram, and Minale Tattersfield and Partners.

Minale Tattersfield and Partners was the successful bidder.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if the Modernising Government logo was tested on the public; and how much this research cost. [80882]

Mr. Kilfoyle: It was not.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what criteria were specified for the design of the Modernising Government logo. [80881]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The main criteria specified for the design of the Modernising Government logo were that it should remain fresh over the period of a change management programme lasting a number of years; be capable of application to a wide range of material such as literature, computer screens and stationery; be capable of complementing other logos and publication designs; and be upbeat, bold and distinctive.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what was the cost of developing the Modernising Government logo. [80879]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The direct cost of developing the Modernising Government logo was £41,020.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list which areas of expenditure in his Department in the non-criminal legal aid budget will be funded first when the criminal legal aid budget has been met; and if he will make a statement about how these areas have been determined. [R] [81120]

Mr. Hoon: It is an oversimplification to suggest that help through the Community Legal Service will be provided only after claims for criminal work. The Lord Chancellor has said that there will not be an overall budget for legal aid or a cash limit. In order to make the expenditure in each area transparent, the Lord Chancellor has made a commitment to inform Parliament immediately of any transfer of resources (other than a *de minimis* one) between the Criminal Defence Service and the Community Legal Service. The Lord Chancellor will direct national priorities for public funding taking account of the findings of need and the Government's intention to give priority to tackling social and economic exclusion. The White Paper "Modernising Justice" indicated that likely areas of priority would be social welfare cases; other cases of fundamental importance to the people affected (such as child protection, and protecting people from violence); and cases involving a wider public interest. The Access to Justice Bill places a duty on the Legal Services Commission to assess the need for legal services throughout the country and to

inform the Lord Chancellor of its findings, these findings will be used to direct resources so that identified priority areas receive funding.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what assumptions he has made about factors affecting the need for criminal legal aid with particular reference to *(a)* demographic trends, *(b)* economic trends, *(c)* social trends and *(d)* policy changes in arriving at the estimated expenditure on criminal legal aid for 1999–2000 and 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [R] [81118]

Mr. Hoon: No explicit assumptions are made about demographic, economic or social trends. However, forecasts do take account of inflationary pressures and planned policy change effects. The assumptions underpinning the likely impact of policy change effects take account of price, volume and behavioural changes.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he has set a level of funding for *(a)* civil legal aid and *(b)* advice and assistance below which he does not consider it viable to reduce them for (1) 1999–2000 and (2) 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [R] [81119]

Mr. Hoon: No minimum levels of funding for civil legal aid and advice and assistance have been set. Neither I nor the Lord Chancellor believe that any Minister in a responsible Government would be willing to guarantee that a given level of spending on a particular function would be maintained, whatever financial pressures might fall unexpectedly on his or her Department.

We are, however, determined that the Community Legal Service, which will encompass civil legal aid and advice and assistance, will be properly funded. The available resources will be committed to the Community Legal Service through the system of contracting, and will be allocated to meet priority need. In order to provide contractors with reassurance that funding will not be suddenly cut or contracts terminated, the Lord Chancellor has asked the Legal Aid Board to extend from six to twelve months the notice that will need to be given to vary or terminate a contract, except in cases of misbehaviour or breach.

Solicitors (Limited Liability)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to permit solicitors to practise as limited liability companies; and if he will make a statement. [R] [81097]

Mr. Hoon: Individual solicitors are already permitted to practise as limited liability companies although very few do. Limited Liability Partnerships are not at present permitted under English law. A Bill is currently being prepared by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to introduce Limited Liability Partnerships into Great Britain. It will be for the Law Society to decide whether solicitors will be able to take advantage of this new way of structuring their businesses.

Conditional Fees (Insurance)

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *610*, if he will publish such details of insurance products to support the use of conditional fees as are available to him. [81146]

Mr. Hoon: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman requires details of the products available, I suggest he approaches the providers of the insurance products. Those of which I am aware are:

First Assist;

Collegiate Insurance Brokers Ltd;

Abbey Legal Protection;

Amicus;

Eastgate Assistance;

Saturn Professional Risks Ltd;

Litigation Protection Ltd; and

Greystoke Legal Services.

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make public the names of all applicants for silk during the assessment process of their applications; and if he will make a statement. [81500]

Mr. Hoon: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has no plans to publish the names of all applicants for Queen's Counsel at any stage of the silk process.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will introduce fixed-term appointments for Queen's Counsel; and if he will make a statement. [81501]

Mr. Hoon: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has no plans to introduce fixed term appointments for Queen's Counsel.

Convicted Murderers

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many cases there have been in the last 10 years in which convicted murderers who have themselves been victims of abuse by those they have murdered have *(a)* had their abusive experience taken into account as a mitigating circumstance and *(b)* not been given a custodial sentence; [80184]

(2) how many female victims of alleged domestic abuse by their partners who have been prosecuted for murdering that partner have been *(a)* acquitted and *(b)* convicted within the last 10 years; and what range of custodial sentence they have been given. [80182]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 21 April 1999

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Reform

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will assess the benefits of using the concept of institutional *(a)* sectarianism and *(b)* anti-nationalism within the context of reforming policing in Northern Ireland. [80723]

Mr. Ingram: The Government consider equality of treatment and respect for different cultures as fundamental aspects of the ethos of any police service.

The terms of reference of the Independent Commission on policing, as established by the Good Friday Agreement, require the Commission to make proposals designed to ensure that policing arrangements, including composition, recruitment, training, culture, ethos and symbols, are such that the police service in Northern Ireland can enjoy widespread support from, and be seen as an integral part of, the community as a whole.

The Commission is consulting widely, and will report this Summer. The Government look forward to receiving the Commission's report.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the cost of the Northern Ireland Assembly is drawn from the Northern Ireland grant; and what the costs of the Assembly *(a)* were in the 1998–99 financial year and *(b)* are projected to be in the 1999–2000 financial year. [81037]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Yes. 1998–99 expenditure was £10.6m. It will be for the Assembly to determine its operating costs in 1999–2000. In February, the Assembly Commission estimated this at £36m.

Policing Costs

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the cost of policing civil unrest continues to be a charge against the Northern Ireland grant; and what the cost of this policing has been in the 1998–99 financial year. [80914]

Mr. Ingram: Provision for the requirements of the Law and Order programmes is included within the overall Northern Ireland Departmental Expenditure Limit and will remain the responsibility of the Secretary of State after devolution.

The additional costs of the Royal Ulster Constabulary operations at Drumcree and elsewhere during July 1998 amounted to £11 million. Since July the additional costs incurred, in respect of the continuing presence needed to police the ongoing protest, are approximately £0.4 million per month.

The costs of policing other public disorder during 1998–99 are not readily available and would incur disproportionate cost to provide.

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for the week ended Saturday 10 April the number of violent incidents involving paramilitary groups which took place in Northern Ireland, indicating how many involved (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups. [80912]

Mr. Ingram: The number of security incidents during the period 4 April to 10 April 1999 are as shown:

Shooting incidents: 1

Bombing incidents: 1

Notes:

1. Figures may be subject to minor amendment
2. The bombing incident cannot as yet be firmly attributed to a grouping.

For the number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks see the answer to uin 80913.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for the week ended Saturday 10 April the number of *(a)* punishment beatings and *(b)* punishment shootings which took place in Northern Ireland indicating how many in each category were committed by (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups. [80913]

Mr. Ingram: The number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks during the period 4 April to 10 April are as follows:

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*
Assaults	Nil	1
Shootings	1	Nil

Note:
Figures may be subject to minor amendment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for the week ended Saturday 3 April the number of violent incidents involving paramilitary groups which took place in Northern Ireland, indicating how many involved (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups. [80910]

Mr. Ingram: The number of security incidents during the period 28 March to 3 April 1999 are as shown:

	Number
Shooting incidents	1
Bombing incidents	4

Notes:

1. Figures may be subject to a minor amendment
2. The bombing incidents cannot as yet to be firmly attributed to a grouping

For the number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks see the answer to uin 80911.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for the week ended Saturday 3 April the number of *(a)* punishment beatings and *(b)* punishment shootings which took place in

Northern Ireland indicating how many in each category were committed by (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups. [80911]

Mr. Ingram: The number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks during the period 28 March to 3 April are as follows:

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*
Assaults	nil	1
Shootings	1	nil

Note:
Figures may be subject to minor amendment

CS Sprays

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *825*, on CS sprays, for what reasons the Royal Ulster Constabulary has not been issued with CS sprays. [80870]

Mr. Ingram: The use of CS spray is relatively recent innovation in British policing. The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary keeps under review the personal protective equipment available to and approved for use by police officers throughout the United Kingdom. The risks and threats to police officers in Northern Ireland have demanded protective measure different from their colleagues in the rest of the United Kingdom. All options are however kept under review.

CR Gas

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer of 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *825–26*, if CR gas has been issued to the Royal Ulster Constabulary since 1969. [80869]

Mr. Ingram: CR tear gas is not issued to the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Professional Statisticians

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many staff by grade are employed as professional statisticians in her Department; how many of these staff have been accepted as fast stream by the Civil Service Selection Board; and how many have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society; [81197]

(2) how many staff who have worked as professional statisticians in the Northern Ireland Civil Service have left on early retirement in each of the past 10 years. [81173]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Statistics Research Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. E. F. Jardine. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. F. Jardine to Mr. Menzies Campbell, dated 20 April 1999:

I am replying to your questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about the employment of professional statisticians as this matter falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

The Agency employs 127 staff with the generic title 'Statistician'. These staff perform a broad range of analytical functions including statistical work, social surveys and social research. The staff are graded as follows:

	Number
Senior Civil Service	1
Senior Principal Statistician	2
Grade 7 Statistician	17
Deputy Principal Statistician	41
Assistant Statistician	66

1. A further 11 staff, originally recruited to the discipline, are now working in administrative grades.
2. These figures exclude staff who are not in post, ie. who are on secondment or on career breaks.

Two NISRA staff are Chartered Statisticians and a further six are RSS Fellows. In the past 10 years 1 professional statistician has left on early retirement.

In addition, 4 Economists in the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland undertake statistical activities which parallel those performed by members of the Government Statistical Service in MAFF. Two of these staff are at Grade 7 and two are Assistant Statistician equivalent.

NISRA does not recruit 'Statisticians' by the fast stream method. Staff are selected through Northern Ireland Civil Service recruitment competitions following a series of tests and interview.

If I can be of further assistance do not hesitate to contact me.

HEALTH

Spectacles (Children)

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government are taking to publicise free availability of spectacles for children. [79050]

Mr. Denham: Under the National Health Service optical voucher scheme children under the age of 16 and young people aged 16 to 18, who are in full time education, are entitled to an optical voucher which they may use to buy spectacles from a basic range or, if they choose, put towards the cost of more expensive spectacles or contact lenses. These arrangements are publicised in the following leaflets which the Department distributes to a wide range of public premises including optical practices, doctors' surgeries, pharmacies, post offices and social security offices:

HC11 "Are you entitled to help with health costs".

HC12 "NHS charges and optical voucher values".

HIV

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken *(a)* to implement the Stocktake Group report on support for HIV services and *(b)* to require health authorities to take timely decisions on funding HIV related services in financial year 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [79704]

Ms Jowell: I am currently considering the recommendations of the Stocktake Group on the long-term future funding of HIV/AIDS treatment and care. Notification of the HIV/AIDS treatment and care and HIV prevention budgets for 1999–2000 was made to health authorities on 15 April, and a copy of the Allocations Working Paper (AWP (99–00) HA36) showing initial

allocations to each health authority has been placed in the House of Commons Library. Guidance to health authorities on the use of these funds will be issued shortly.

Biggleswade and Steppingley Hospitals

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from mid-Bedfordshire general practitioners with regard to the review of Biggleswade and Steppingley hospitals. [80460]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, column 269.

Clinical Excellence

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on Government policy on the development of regional and sub-regional centres of clinical and medical excellence and the role of *(a)* local hospitals and *(b)* health resource centres in the context of the move towards regional and sub-regional concentration. [80455]

Mr. Denham: We are committed to the development of clinical excellence at all levels within the National Health Service, as set out in "A First Class Service: Quality in the NHS". National Service Frameworks and guidance issued nationally by the Government support health authorities and trusts in the development of clinical excellence locally.

However, it is for health authorities, primary care groups and NHS trusts to determine the most appropriate range and configurations of health services to meet local needs.

DTP Vaccine

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when research projects *(a)* started and *(b)* concluded at Porton Down into the development of an acellular DTP vaccine; how much the research programme cost; and when and for what reasons the Government decided to purchase such vaccines in the United States rather than continue development in the UK. [80646]

Ms Jowell: Work on acellular pertussis vaccine commenced at the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research (CAMR) (as the then named Microbiological Research Establishment under the Ministry of Defence) in 1974 and continued until 1993–94. Costs for the period 1974 to 1979 when the centre was under the Ministry of Defence are not available. Costs to the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) and the Department from 1979 to 1993–94 (when the PHLS managed CAMR) were some £2.7 million, although some additional costs would have been incurred by PHLS and the Medical Research Council for clinical trials and by Porton Speywood for vaccine manufacture and trials.

The acellular pertussis vaccine development at CAMR was discontinued when the CAMR vaccine was not selected by international researchers for inclusion in trials comparing candidate pertussis vaccines. However, the agglutinogen components, the novel feature of the CAMR vaccine, were subsequently incorporated into a Canadian manufactured vaccine, along with other components not in the CAMR vaccine. This Canadian vaccine has been shown in studies to be the only acellular vaccine to provide protection comparable to that from the presently used UK whole cell pertussis vaccine. The studies have also shown that there is little difference in the level of local reactions and fever seen after use of the United Kingdom whole cell pertussis vaccine when compared to acellular pertussis vaccines under the immunisation schedule used in the UK.

The United States of America manufactured acellular vaccine purchased for UK use was chosen since it was the only single antigen, that is pertussis only, vaccine available.

Air Quality

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of *(a)* the annual number of early deaths and hospital admissions currently attributable to particle pollution, *(b)* the reduction in early deaths and hospital admissions by 2005, if the whole of the UK were to meet its current national air quality objective for particles and *(c)* the reduction in early deaths and hospital admissions by 2005, if the whole of the UK were to meet the proposed EC Air Quality Daughter Directive Stage 1 limit value for particles. [80782]

Ms Jowell: The Department has quantified the impact on health from current and future levels of airborne particle (PM_{10}) concentrations in the United Kingdom as follows.

The Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants' report 'Quantification of the Effects of Air Pollution on Health in the United Kingdom' concluded that PM_{10} concentrations in 1996 were likely to have brought forward the deaths of around 8,100 people in the UK. It also concluded that PM_{10} concentrations in 1996 contributed to about 10,500 respiratory hospital admissions, which may have been brought forward or additional. In both cases the people most at risk are likely to be the elderly suffering from chronic heart and lung diseases.

The Government recently published their proposals for review of the National Air Quality Strategy, and, in particular, their proposals for revised and additional objectives for the pollutants. During the review process, as a result of a better understanding of the sources and types of particles in the UK provided by the work of the Airborne Particles Expert Group, it became apparent that the current PM_{10} objective would not be achievable in a number of local authority areas with any measures that are currently practicable. The Expert Group's work also revealed the importance of non-UK sources and the limit to which local authority and central Government action alone could control levels of PM_{10}. The Government are consulting on a proposal to replace the current PM_{10} objective with the Stage 1 limit values in the European Community Air Quality Daughter Directive, while retaining the current objective as an indicative level. Although sufficient information was not available to estimate the benefits of meeting the current objective across the whole of the UK, further work is planned to estimate the benefits of reducing levels of PM_{10} below the limit values as part of the next review of the Strategy.

The Government will reconsider the indicative level for particles once clear evidence is available on the significance of $PM_{2.5}$ for health with a view, potentially, to setting an objective based on concentration of this finer fraction. Discussions are also in progress with the UK's EC partners to explore ways of reducing the transboundary particle problem.

There is expected to be a cumulative reduction of about 5,000 early deaths and about 4,000 respiratory hospital admissions over the period 1996 to 2005 as a result of agreed measures to reduce PM_{10}[1]. (Calculations for the year 2005 alone would give about 900 fewer early deaths and about 750 fewer respiratory hospital admissions than in 1996). In a typical year, the predicted concentrations of PM_{10} in 2005 would meet the proposed EC Stage 1 limit value at all urban background locations. There are however likely to be exceedences at busy roadsides in some large urban areas and possibly in the vicinity of some industrial plants.

[1] Review of the National Air Quality Strategy Report, 1999.

Complementary Medicines

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list details of reported cases, over the last five years, of allergic reactions to *(a)* homeopathic medicines, *(b)* herbal medicines and *(c)* vitamin and mineral supplements. [81064]

Ms Jowell: Suspected adverse drug reactions reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines are recorded according to the active drug substance and reports for homeopathic medicines are not specifically identified as such. It is therefore not possible to provide a list of reported allergic reactions to homeopathic medicines.

The total number of suspected adverse drug reaction reports for any medicine containing a herbal ingredient, for the period 1 January 1994 to 31 December 1998, was 174. Suspected allergic reactions associated with medicines containing at least one herbal constituent, reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines for the period 1 January 1994 until 31 December 1998, are given in the table.

Patient sex	*Suspect drug*	*Reaction*	*Outcome of Reaction*
F	Pripsen	Allergic reaction	Recovered after drug withdrawal
F	Colpermin	Allergic reaction	Not known
F	Ledermix dental kit	Anaphylactic reaction	Recovered after treatment
F	Anusol cream	Allergic reaction	Recovering after treatment
F	Arnica extract	Allergic reaction	Not recovered
M	Quiet Life	Allergic rash	Recovering
F	Colpermin	Allergic reaction	Not known
M	Regulan	Allergic rash	Recovered after drug withdrawal

The Yellow Card Scheme for reporting adverse drug reactions was extended to include unlicensed herbal medicines in October 1996.The total number of suspected adverse drug reaction reports for any medicine containing one or more of the drug substances: *ascorbic acid, retinol, riboflavine, thiamine, pyridoxine, nicotinamide, cyanocobalamin, tocopherol, folic acid, iron, calcium, zinc, magnesium, phosphorus, sodium fluoride,* for the period 1 January 1994 to 31 December 1998, was 543. Suspected allergic reactions associated with these drug substances (excluding reports for injectable supplements), reported to the Committee on Safety of Medicines for the period 1 January 1994 until 31 December 1998, are given in the table.

Patient sex	*Suspect dr*	*Reaction(s)*	*Outcome of Reaction*
F	Redoxon, Ca	Allergic reaction, face oedema, pyrexia, eye inflammation	Not known
F	Folic acid, Ferrous gluconate, Ascorbic acid	Anaphylactic reaction	Recovered after treatment

The number of suspected adverse drug reactions reported for a particular drug substance depends on a number of factors, including the extent of use of the drug and the reporting rate for the drug. Medicines in the above categories are often supplied without prescription and it is generally recognised that the reporting rate for medicines supplied over the counter is lower than that for prescription medicines.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times officials from his Department have met officials from the US Government to discuss genetically modified organisms and the biotechnology industry since 1 June 1998; if he will list the dates and locations of each meeting; and with which US Government department his officials had meetings. [81077]

Ms Jowell: Officials from the Department have regular contact with officials from other countries, including the United States of America, for example by joint attendance at conferences. However, no meetings have taken place with officials from the United States of America Government to specifically discuss genetically modified organisms and the biotechnology industry.

Midwives Conference

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons his Department withdrew its proposed stand from the Conference of the Royal College of Midwives in Glasgow; and if he will make a statement. [81416]

Ms Jowell: Since the conference was planned to take place shortly before the elections to the Scottish Parliament, it was not thought appropriate for the Government to take a publicity stand.

Mental Health

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of the black and ethnic minority communities to discuss mental health treatment. [81411]

Mr. Hutton: I held a meeting with representatives of black and minority ethnic interests on 31 March 1999 to discuss the development of the Mental Health National Service Framework.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the NHS budget was allocated to mental health services for each of the last three years. [81412]

Mr. Hutton: A national weighted capitation formula is used as the basis for allocating hospital and community health services revenue to health authorities. The purpose of the formula is to set targets to enable the equitable distribution of resources based on the health care requirements of different resident populations. This cannot be broken down into a mental health component.

The proportion of total health authority expenditure spent on mental illness was 9.24 per cent. for 1997–98, 8.38 per cent. for 1996–97 and 11.44 per cent. for 1995–96.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to health authorities regarding mental health treatment for members of the black and ethnic minority communities. [81410]

Mr. Hutton: Advice sent to health authorities on mental health treatment applies equally to all users of mental health services, whatever their ethnic origin.

The Government's strategy document "Modernising Mental Health Services: safe, sound and supportive" makes clear the Government's commitment to ensuring that everyone with mental health problems is treated fairly, on the basis of need, in a manner which preserves their autonomy and which promotes opportunity for choice. This document was distributed to every health authority in December 1998.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the principal advances in treatment which have been implemented in mental health since 1995. [81413]

Mr. Hutton: Information about the advances in treatments for those with mental health problems is available in the academic literature. An example of this is the collation of the latest research by the Cochrane Group, copies of which are available in the Library.

The Cochrane Library is a regularly updated library designed to give the evidence needed for informed health care decision making. Launched in 1995 under the name of The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, it has been renamed to reflect the inclusion of further important databases.

The Cochrane Controlled Trials Register is a bibliography of over 150,000 controlled trials identified by contributors to the Cochrane Collaboration and others including many trials not currently listed on Medline or other bibliographical databases.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental health patients were treated on the NHS over the last five years. [81414]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the estimated number of finished consultant episodes (FCEs) under a mental health[1] specialty in National Health Service trusts in England, 1993–94 to 1997–98.

[1] Mental Health specialties are as follows: mental handicap; mental illness; child and adolescent psychiatry; forensic psychiatry; psychotherapy; old age psychiatry.

Year	*Estimated number of FCEs under a mental health specialty*
1993–94	293,720
1994–95	295,470
1995–96	297,510
1996–97[1]	263,550
1997–98[1]	244,090

[1] Data for these years are provisional; final figures are likely to be higher due to adjustments for shortfalls in data.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends the composition of the appraisal groups established by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to be in accordance with the proposals made in the document, Faster Access to Modern Treatment. [81230]

Mr. Denham: Ministers are considering the response to the discussion document "Faster Access to Modern Treatment: how NICE appraisal will work" and further announcements will be made shortly.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the high level targets for the Medicines Control Agency for 1999–2000. [81848]

Ms Jowell: The high level targets for the Medicines Control Agency are included in its Annual Business Plan, copies of which have been placed in the Library today.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Bypasses

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what non-road solutions county councils should demonstrate they have considered when putting forward a request for funding for a village bypass designed to reduce the volume of traffic passing through that village. [80581]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The allocation of central government funding for local transport projects will in future be based on 5-year local transport plans. Revised guidance for local authorities on preparation of their provisional local transport plans was published on 12 April. Where a major road scheme forms part of a plan we will expect it to have been assessed using the New Approach to Appraisal (NATA) developed during the 1997/98 review of the trunk road programme.

NATA requires the identification of alternative options capable of addressing the transport problem. Possible options will depend on the nature of the problem. In the case of heavy traffic flows through a village they might

include alternative traffic management strategies; seeking to reduce traffic flows by encouraging a shift to alternative forms of transport; or introduction of traffic calming measures to reduce the adverse impacts of the traffic. This process should also include assessment of different routes and standards for any bypass.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the cost of reducing vehicle excise duty on gas-fuelled vehicles to £20. [80013]

Ms Glenda Jackson: At 31 December 1998, DVLA records showed a total of 2,669 licensed gas vehicles in Great Britain. Of these, 420 were licensed in exempt classes and the large majority of the remainder were licensed either as Private or Light Goods vehicles or as agricultural vehicles. We therefore estimate that the revenue cost of reducing vehicle excise duty to £20 on these vehicles would be substantially less than £1 million. However, the Government are encouraging the switch to gas and other low pollutant fuels and we would expect the number of gas-powered vehicles to increase significantly in the future.

Regional Development

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources have been allocated to regional development agencies for 1999–2000. [81847]

Mr. Caborn: The allocations are as follows:

Development Agency	*£ million*
North East	121.198
North West	176.104
Yorkshire and the Humber	136.633
West Midlands	114.111
East Midlands	59.184
East of England	31.397
South West	60.138
South East England	73.410
Total	772.175

These are substantial allocations and reflect the fact that Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) will play a major part in implementing the strategies that they will be developing for their regions as a whole.

RDAs' budgets are made up from the DETR-funded regeneration programmes which they have inherited from English Partnerships (EP), the Government Offices for the Regions and the Rural Development Commission, together with money from the Department of Trade and Industry for inward investment and competitiveness, and from the Department for Education and Employment for skills development. They also include RDAs' own running costs. Regeneration programmes make up 87 per cent. of the total budget and variations in allocations reflect the regions' different regeneration needs. In addition, RDAs will receive funding from EP to carry out the Coalfields Programme, totalling some £50 million in 1999–2000.

The allocations exclude EP's Partnership Investment Programme (PIP), totalling £145 million in 1999–2000 which will remain with EP pending the resolution of issues which the Government is currently discussing with the European Commission. However, the RDAs and EP will be co-operating closely on PIP projects.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the value is of the commitments that have been entered into which are *(a)* legally binding and *(b)* agreed in principle by Government Departments in the regions, English Partnership and other public bodies in relation to economic development in the (i) North West, (ii) North East and (iii) Yorkshire and Humberside regions for the years (1) 1999–2000, (2) 2000–01 and (3) 2001–02. [81088]

Mr. Caborn: Information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources are being made available from public funds in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01, and (iii) 2001–02 for economic development in the *(a)* North West, *(b)* North East and *(c)* Yorkshire and Humberside regions through (1) their regional development agencies and (2) other sources. [81089]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts). Information about funding through regional development agencies is also contained in the Department's 1999 Annual Report (Cm 4204), copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The other information is not available in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Secondment

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the names of the officials at his Department who are currently on secondment from private companies and the companies by which they are employed. [81121]

Mr. Meacher: There are currently 26 people on secondment to the Department from private companies. They are listed in the table. This answer also covers Government Offices, the responsibility for which is shared with the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment and Trade and Industry.

Name	*Company*
T. Bibby	Tyneside TEC
A. Blumenthal	Crown House Engineering
A. Carter-Gray	Boots the Chemist Ltd.
D. Cobb	College of North East London
M Coe	Unilever
C. Courtney	Kvaerner Cementation Foundations
P. Craddock	Ove Arup
K. Curran	LETEC
D. Dawson	D. A. Dawson and Associates
S. Drummond	National Grid
R. Evans	Bovis Construction
L. Gilmour	Sunderland TEC
N. Harles	Hider
K. Henry	Sunderland TEC

Name	Company
J. Hall	Institute for Fiscal Studies
P. Jones	Kvaerner Cementation Foundations
S. McKenna	Waters Ltd.
J. Mead	Construction Industry Council
M. Mitchell	British Gas
R. Murphy	Tyneside TEC
P. Runacres	Geoffrey Reid Associates
M. Salter	OPM
A. Stacey	ABROS
K. Treadaway	Building Research Establishment
S. Tindale	IPPR
A. Wain	Kvaerener Construction

Local Authority Housing Stock

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will rank the 10 local authorities with the greatest number of dwellings built before 1919. [81351]

Mr. Raynsford: The latest available information is as follows:

Local authority stock at 1 April 1998

Local district or unitary authority	Number of dwellings
Islington	7,934
Camden	7,733
Southwark	6,155
Lambeth	5,560
Lewisham	4,867
Leeds	4,827
Hammersmith	4,491
Birmingham	4,240
Westminster	3,765
Haringey	2,562

Source:
DETR Subsidy Claim Form 1998

Private sector stock (including stock of Registered Social Landlords) in 1989

Local district or unitary authority	Number of dwellings
Birmingham	105,485
Liverpool	66,586
Manchester	61,894
Bristol	60,572
Westminster	58,459
Bradford	57,023
Kensington and Chelsea	53,021
Wandsworth	51,889
Kirklees	51,838
Sheffield	51,819

Source:
DOE Housing stock survey 1989

The figures of private sector stock do not take account of sales or transfers by local authorities after 1989.

Road Haulage Industry

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each of the vehicles listed in Schedule I, paragraphs 3, 5, 6 and 8 of the 1999 Finance Bill the costs in each European Union Country, of *(a)* any taxes paid, and the rate of such tax on (i) a new vehicle, (ii) a second-hand vehicle, *(b)* the vehicle excise duty or the equivalent tax, *(c)* the total tax on a litre of fuel, *(d)* tax paid on lubricants, *(e)* running commercial vehicles, on average, *(f)* running commercial vehicles per mile, *(g)* running a commercial vehicle for a year, *(h)* running a commercial vehicle for 100,000 miles, *(i)* running a commercial vehicle over the average life of such a vehicle, the estimates of (e) (f) (g) (h) and (i) all to be exclusive of salaries and wages, and where the vehicle descriptions are not the same in each country all figures and sums to relate to the nearest equivalent vehicle in each country and all sums to be shown in Sterling. [81155]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The information requested by the hon. Member is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, my Department estimates that the cost of running a fleet of 50 38 tonne trucks will be about £425,000 higher in France than in the UK; about £600,000 more in the Netherlands; and about £800,000 more in Belgium.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the amount of subsidy paid to the road haulage industry in each European Union country in the last financial year; and if he will indicate the basis on which such help is determined. [81158]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* Explicit subsidy to the road haulage industry in EU Member States is generally prohibited by European Community State Aid rules, but assistance can be provided to promote research or the development of more economical transport systems and technologies, to eliminate excess capacity which causes serious structural problems, to facilitate the development of combined transport or to compensate for public service obligations. Information is not available about the extent to which such payments are made in other Member States.

However, there is considerable variance in the extent to which the road haulage industries in Member States meet their full costs—to the economy, environment and infrastructure. This depends on the levels of taxation and haulage industry-related expenditure in each country.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the tonnage of goods transported by the UK road haulage industry in each of the last three years (i) within the UK, (ii) from the UK and (iii) into the UK; and what was the tonnage of goods moved by vehicles *(a)* owned by and *(b)* operated from other EU countries in each of those years. [81157]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The tonnage of goods transported by UK-registered goods vehicles over 3.5 tonnes gross weight in 1995, 1996 and 1997 (the last three years for which figures are available) was:

	Within the UK million tonnes	From the UK thousand tonnes	Into the UK thousand tonnes
1995	1,655	6,607	6,977
1996	1,683	7,279	7,802
1997	1,693	7,539	7,984

Statistics are unavailable about vehicles owned by or operated from other EU countries. However, figures suggest that the amount of local cabotage carried out

by foreign registered trucks was significantly less than 1 per cent. This is an issue which may be addressed by the Road Haulage Forum.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his estimate of the extent of over-capacity of the road haulage industry in the United Kingdom; what proportion of the road haulage vehicles operating in the UK are (i) UK owned, (ii) UK registered and (iii) from other EU countries. [81154]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* No reliable comprehensive estimate of the over-capacity in the haulage industry in the UK exists at present but we believe it to be significant. A comprehensive assessment of over-capacity is an issue which may be addressed as part of the work of the Haulage Industry Forum.

Information on the nationality of ownership of vehicles is not held by my Department. The proportion of international freight journeys to and from the UK undertaken by UK hauliers in the 12 months ending September 1998—the latest period for which statistics are available—was 44 per cent., which is little different from the long-term average. In 1997—the latest date for which we have information—we understand that the overall level of cabotage by EU hauliers within the UK accounted for substantially less than 1 per cent. of total freight moved.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the items he took into account when estimating the running costs of a goods vehicle in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) each of the other EU countries. [81153]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 16 April 1999]:* The estimates of relative running costs between the UK and certain other EU member states issued by my Department concerned the relative costs of setting up a fleet of 50 vehicles involved in international transport. Items taken into account included labour costs and taxes, corporation tax and annual circulation taxes (i.e. vehicle excise duty or its equivalent). For international operations, the estimates assumed the same levels of fuel costs, because those operating internationally—whether UK or foreign owned—can take advantage of the lowest fuel costs on their route.

Parkway Site, South Yorkshire

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish his decision on whether to allow Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council to determine the planning application for retail stores on the Parkway/Poplar Way site at Catcliffe, South Yorkshire, for Sterling Capital Securities plc; and if he will make a statement. [81480]

Mr. Raynsford: The Secretary of State will issue his decision on this case as soon as possible. It would be inappropriate to make a further statement at this time.

Rural Action for the Environment

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the benefit of the Rural Action for the Environment scheme; and what support will be made available for the continuation of this scheme in 1999–2000. [81392]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* I refer to my answer of 12 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *169* and *187*.

I understand that the Countryside Agency, together with English Nature, will conduct, over the coming year, a comprehensive review of local community based action, including Rural Action for the Environment, and the benefits of small grants in achieving that. The funding which they are making available to the Rural Action county networks will support the networks' input to that review.

More recently, the National Lottery Charities Board (NLCB) has offered funding to a consortium led by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), and including the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and the Wildlife Trust Partnership, for a body—not yet constituted but also, I understand, intended to be called Rural Action—to run a programme of support for disadvantaged rural groups with a view to helping them undertake sustainable local projects. ACRE has approached DETR for grant aid in support of the NLCB offer, and this is under consideration.

Transport Costs

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), of 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column 9, concerning transport costs per tonne-kilometre, when he will produce such an analysis; whether such an analysis will be produced by a firm without other contractual links with the Government; and if he will make a statement. [81600]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 20 April 1999]:* The Road Haulage Forum which was set up in conjunction with industry will look at potential indicators and statistics relevant to the current debate over road haulage. Additionally the ongoing review of lorry VED, announced by the Chancellor in the March 1998 Budget, will continue to examine the basis on which lorry VED is determined, in terms of road track costs and environmental impact.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about Government plans to supervise experiments on genetically modified crops. [80317]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 15 April 1999, *Official Report, columns 301–02*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson).

Motorcycling Advisory Group

Ms Blears: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to establish a motorcycling advisory group. [81949]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My noble Friend Lord Whitty, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, will be chairing the first meeting of the Motorcycling Advisory Group on 6 May. This follows a preliminary meeting we had with industry representatives in December last year to hear their views before widening the debate to take forward policy on the role of motorcycling in integrated transport. We are bringing together Government, representatives of the industry and those interested in the effects of motorcycling to discuss a range of issues which will allow us to develop well informed policies.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Credit Guarantees

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the 10 companies in receipt of the highest level of export credit guarantees for the financial year 1997–98, indicating the amount of cover given for each company and listing the projects for which the cover was given. [80116]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The information is as follows:

Value of contracts supported under EGCD guarantees issued in 1997–98—top 10 exporters

Exporter	*Nature of projects*	*Markets*	*Value of contracts (£ million)*
British Aerospace	Defence	Saudi Arabia, Qatar	[1]2,132
	Civil Aerospace	Indonesia, Canada, Korea, Philippines, Croatia, Portugal, China, El Salvador, Turkey, Mauritius, Colombia	[1]427
Chiyoda-Foster Wheeler	LNG plant	Oman	372
Taylor Woodrow/Skanska Joint Venture	Rail Transportation	Russia	146
Marconi Avionics	Radio Communications	USA	109
Matra BAe Dynamics	Defence	Korea, Kuwait	94
VAI Industries	Steel Mill	South Africa	81
AMEC International	Construction	Hong Kong	80
Balfour Beatty	Construction	Egypt	73
Rolls Royce	Aero Engines	UAE	61
Kvaerner Cleveland Bridge	Construction	China	55

[1] Values also include amounts in respect of Rolls Royce aero engines

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80534]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *239*.

This Department has already launched a Programme of Action for Racial Equality. Its key objectives are to address the problem of under-representation of ethnic minority staff at middle and senior management levels within the Department and raise awareness of racial equality issues among all of its staff. The Department will continue to review its policies in the light of the inquiry's recommendations.

Trade and the Environment Symposium

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of the High Level Symposium on Trade and the Environment in Geneva on 15 and 16 March. [79662]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* The aim of the High Level Symposium on trade and the environment was to promote a constructive debate between capital-based representatives of national governments from developed and developing countries as well as members of civil society and international bodies. Although no conclusions were reached, improved understanding between the different communities will help to build consensus that trade and the environment should be included in a comprehensive New Round of trade negotiations.

Small Business Service

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the annual running cost of the Small Business Service. [80820]

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the annual budget of the Small Business Service over each of the next five years. [81063]

Mr. Wills: The specific responsibilities of the Small Business Service will be decided after a period of consultation with a wide range of interested parties, which is likely to conclude in late summer. It is not possible to make an estimate of annual running costs of the SBS in advance of decisions about responsibilities.

Strategic Exports

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to require the publication of annual reports on strategic exports and to permit scrutiny by relevant parliamentary bodies. [81171]

Mr. Byers: The suggestion that publication of an Annual Report should be made a statutory requirement was made by Oxfam in their response to the Government's White Paper on Strategic Export Controls,

published in July 1998 (cm 3989). This will be considered as part of the review of the White Paper proposals in the light of all the responses to it.

The Government's first annual report on strategic export controls was published on 25 March 1999, as noted by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in his answer of that date to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) *Official Report*, column *343*. In its recent report on Strategic Export Controls (HC65), the Trade and Industry Committee noted that it had, in conjunction with other Select Committees, proposed on an experimental basis a system of joint inquiry by select committees on the first Annual Report, and that the report of that committee could be expected to make detailed proposals based on experience as to how the exercise should be managed next time around. In its response to the report (HC270) the Government welcomed this plan.

Export Controls

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *571–72*, on export controls, what estimate he has made of the length of time which it will take the Governments of *(a)* Algeria and *(b)* Jordan to repay the debt arising from Export Credits Guarantee Department claims for sales to defence buyers. [80941]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* Under the terms of the current UK/Algeria and UK/Jordan Debt Agreements covering both civil and military debt, the final repayments are due on 30 November 2011 and 30 April 2016 respectively. Jordan is in the process of negotiating a new IMF programme which is expected to involve a further rescheduling of its Paris Club debt.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made by UK offshore oil and gas producers and oil companies to deal with the millennium bug; and what measures have been taken by his Department to ensure the security of concessionary coal supplies over this period. [81700]

Mr. Wills: I can now report the findings of the independent assessment process established by the DTI which confirms that UK oil companies and offshore gas producers are on track to ensure that there will be no major disruption to supplies due to the Year 2000 threat to computer systems. The DTI has taken on the role of "responsible body" reporting to the ACTION 2000 National Infrastructure Forum on the Year 2000 preparations being made by the oil industry and UK's offshore oil and gas producers.

The DTI has approached this task in a systematic way, making full use of the industry's own resources. It has engaged W. S. Atkins Consultants Limited—an internationally known and highly respected engineering consultancy with extensive experience within the oil and gas industry—to independently validate the process adopted and its results. The industry has fully supported this important work and provided full and frank access to all the relevant information and staff.

The independent verification approach adopted by DTI has been agreed with ACTION 2000 and designed to build on the work already in hand by offshore and onshore companies to avoid duplication of effort. It has been closely supported by the relevant trade associations (UKOOA—UK Offshore Oil Operators Association, UKPIA—UK Petroleum Industry Association and AUKOI—Association of UK Oil Independents).

For the offshore sector, DTI arranged for companies to conduct a stringent assessment process supported by UKOOA, which involved preparation of a report on each operator's state of readiness and its independent confirmation by, either a "peer group assessor" or an external consultant.

To further enhance the independent element in this process, W. S. Atkins carried out a programme of visits to review the process adopted, the supporting data and its conclusions. The format and extent of the visit programme was determined by W. S. Atkins. It covered all the key elements of the offshore oil and gas industry including production and onshore terminal/pipeline facilities, and was designed to ensure they could reach a fair view on the overall status of the upstream industry.

For the downstream oil sector covering the supply and distribution of refined oil products, W. S. Atkins were engaged to carry out a more intensive role. They prepared and issued on behalf of DTI a detailed and closely targeted questionnaire to all the main downstream players. Following a detailed analysis of the responses W. S. Atkins conducted a series of detailed on-site follow-up visits designed to validate the questionnaire responses. Officials from DTI and other interested Government Departments also participated in some of the visits.

Again the visit programme was determined by W. S. Atkins and designed to ensure that they were able to form a fair view of the overall status of the downstream industry. The programme was carefully planned to cover all aspects of the industry. It looked vertically through the supply chain and covered refining, pipelines, distribution terminals, and retail outlets. It embraced all sectors of the industry from the majors, and hypermarkets through mid-size players to smaller retailers. It extended throughout the UK covering locations in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Throughout the process, DTI has worked closely with Action 2000, other responsible bodies and the various trade bodies to ensure nothing was overlooked and ensure that the process adopted reflected good Year 2000 practice.

At the National Infrastructure Forum meeting in January 1999, the industry attracted an overall "amber" assessment against the standard colour code adopted by ACTION 2000. I am pleased to report that W. S. Atkins have confirmed that the industry has since then made substantial progress both onshore and offshore. Copies of their summary reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House, and copies made available on the DTI internet site. W. S. Atkins have also confirmed that the validation process adopted by DTI provides an effective means of independently validating the industry's state of

progress, both in terms of its suitability to the offshore/onshore sector, and general good practice in relation to Year 2000 risk assessment.

In detail W. S. Atkins found that more than half of the offshore operators and almost two thirds of the downstream industry now merit a blue assessment (no identified risks of material disruption), and that the remainder were on track to attain that rating once work scheduled during the normal summer shutdown period has been completed, and residual contingency planning and external dependency issues had been finalised.

The DTI has agreed a follow up plan with W. S. Atkins, to monitor progress on the outstanding issues and carry out a further programme of independent check visits to confirm that the scheduled work has been completed successfully. DTI will report on this work at the National Infrastructure Forum meeting in October 1999, and will continue to monitor the industry's progress throughout the millennium period.

Regarding coal, the Department is responsible for supplying concessionary fuel to some 90,000 former employees of British Coal. This accounts for 20–25 per cent. of all solid fuel for domestic use. Currently, two large coal companies are under contract to DTI for the supply and distribution of concessionary fuel (CPL Distribution Ltd. and T. H. Fergusson).

The Department appointed Aon Risk Services Ltd. (risk management consultants) to assess the security of supply of concessionary fuel over the millennium period. This covered the fuel distributors as well as a number of major producers. In addition, Aon was asked to advise on the position in the wider retail market for household coal in so far that the same systems are used by the companies under contract to DTI for distributing concessionary supplies. Aon's conclusions are very encouraging with all the main operators achieving blue rating. The remaining 5 per cent. merit amber rating but are on course to achieve blue rating by October. Aon will be involved in continued monitoring of the position.

Manufacturing (Over-Production)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the extent of world-wide over-production in *(a)* steel, *(b)* petrochemicals and *(c)* other manufacturing industries; and if he will make a statement. [80892]

Mr. Wilson: My Department has not made such assessments.

Internet Trading

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the value of trading over the internet in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years. [81060]

Mr. Wills: Commercially available surveys suggest that in 1998 some £350 million was spent on-line in the UK, which is expected to grow to around £5 billion in 2002.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79629]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), on 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *66*.

Over-50s (Job Initiatives)

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the initiatives taken since 1 May 1997 to help those over 50 years obtain employment. [80790]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Since 1 May 1997, we have introduced a wide range of new measures to help people over 50 to find work. These contribute to our policy of "Better Government for Older People".

In November 1998, I launched for public consultation the draft Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment. This was well received and the final version of the Code will be published in May together with case studies and guidance for employers.

The New Deal for people over 50 was announced by the Chancellor in last month's Budget. This will help people over 50 who have been out of work and on income replacement benefits for more than 6 months, and their dependent partners. It introduces an Employment Credit of £60 a week, £40 for those working part time, for those with incomes of less than £15,000 a year. There will also be learning support of up to £750; guidance from a personal adviser wand extra jobsearch help. This will start in selected pathfinder areas in October and be extended to all parts of the country early in 2000. A consultative document on the detail of this New Deal will be issued shortly.

People aged over 50 also benefit from the steps we have taken to strengthen services for unemployed people generally. Some of the prototype Employment Zones have been developing new approaches to tackling the barriers faced by people over 50. Elsewhere pilots under the New Deal for people over 25 have also been offering special help for people over 50. This New Deal offers a range of help and advice, including a subsidy of £75 a week for employers who recruit people who have been without work for 2 years. The total number of 50+ clients invited to attend an initial interview for the New Deal 25+ pilots is around 2,000. The total number of 50+ clients joining Gateway is just under 2,000. For the New Deal 25+ (June measures) to the end of January 1999, 26,550 people aged 50+ had been invited to attend an initial interview.

The New Deal for Disabled People is piloting a personal adviser service in 12 areas and innovative projects to help disabled people and those with long standing illnesses, many of whom are over 50.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many complaints have been made by New Deal clients on the 18–24 year old programme in each New Deal delivery unit *(a)* since 6 April 1998 for all areas and *(b)* since 1 January 1998 for the Pathfinder areas. [80903]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information on the total number of complaints made by New Deal clients on the 18 to 24 year old programme is not held centrally. Under the Employment Service Jobseeker's Charter, New Deal clients are able to raise any complaints through a number of avenues such as the New Deal Hotline, which is available to both clients and employers for compliments and complaints. Hotline inquiries are collated centrally as per the following table, however, the majority of any complaints are dealt with at local level with the New Deal Personal Adviser. The level of satisfaction amongst young people participating on New Deal is one of the Core Performance Measures. Information about this will be published, by Unit of Delivery, later in the year.

Region	*Number of calls received*
London and South East	46
Northern	14
Scotland	158
Wales	18
South West	3
East Midlands	151
West Midlands	60
North West	111
Yorkshire and The Humber	165
Total	726

Open University

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number per head of population studying with the Open University in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Herefordshire, *(c)* the local education authority with the highest number of Open University students per head and *(d)* the local education authority with the lowest number of Open University students per head; and if he will make a statement. [80929]

Mr. Mudie: Information on the number per head of population studying with the Open University in each local education authority is not available centrally. The available information based on data at English and Welsh county level is given in the following table.

Numbers per 100,000 of the population studying with the Open University 1997–98

	Number
England and Wales	236
Hereford and Worcester	278
County with highest figure per head	664
County with the lowest figure per head	85

Students (Herefordshire)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students from Herefordshire are currently in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time (1) higher education and (2) further education; how many are studying with the Open University; and if he will make a statement. [80928]

Mr. Mudie: Information for Herefordshire is not available centrally. The available information for Hereford and Worcester is given in the following table.

Students whose home domicile was Hereford and Worcester 1997–98

	Full-time	*Part-time*
Higher education	13,597	6,423
Further education	14,394	43,271
Open University	3	1,944

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *196*, how many times Ministers in his Department met their counterparts in the US Administration between 1 January 1998 and 1 June 1998, indicating the dates and locations of each meeting, the ministers involved and the name of the US counterpart. [80823]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities met Alexis Herman at the G8 Employment Conference in London in February 1998.

No other such meetings took place between 1 January 1998 and 1 June 1998.

Departmental Personnel

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many personnel there are on the payroll of his Department currently; what is the annual cost of that payroll; and what were the comparable figures on 30 April 1997. [81084]

Mr. Mudie: I refer the hon. Member to Annexes E*i*, E*ii* and F of the Department's Report (Cm 4202) which is available in the Library.

The Report shows that there are currently 36,088 personnel on the Department's payroll (comprising DfEE HG and the Employment Service). The annual cost of that payroll is £831,004,000. Comparable figures for April 1997 are 41,910 personnel at an annual cost of £772,722,000.

Wirral Metropolitan College

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what are the arrangements for publication of the inspection report on Wirral Metropolitan College. [81209]

Mr. Mudie: The report is expected to be published on 27 April. Copies will be sent to all colleges, national and regional press, subscribers and the Local Education Authority and Training Enterprise Council. I have

arranged for copies to be placed in the Library and it will also be available on the FEFC web site, the address of which is 'www.fefc.ac.uk'.

A copy is sent to the Member in whose constituency the main site of the college is located. However, I have asked in this case for copies to be sent to my hon. Friends the Members for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) and Wallasey (Angela Eagle).

FE College Principals (Retirement Packages)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information about the retirement packages of principals of FE colleges is made publicly available. [81211]

Mr. Mudie: Further education colleges are required to disclose in their annual financial statement the aggregate amount of any compensation paid to senior post holders for loss of office. College financial statements are public documents.

Drugs Misuse Education

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the training given to teachers for the delivery of drugs misuse education in schools. [80313]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Support for drug education teacher training is available to local education authorities through the Standards Fund. One of the requirements of Standards Fund provisions in this area is that local education authorities should submit at the end of the year a report of their drug education work, providing information on, amongst other things, the training of teachers and youth workers. This information allows us to monitor the level and quality of teacher training on drug education and was used to inform the guidance that we issued last November on the effective delivery of drug education in schools and youth service settings.

We have also given detailed consideration to information provided by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in its 1997 report "Drug Education in Schools", on the level and quality of in-service training of teachers relating to drug education.

DEFENCE

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total number of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76834]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on 31 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *674–75*.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to his Department in each of the last five years of evacuating British citizens from overseas trouble spots; which places were involved; and what was the cost for each. [80711]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In the last five years there have been three occasions where the military have evacuated British citizens from overseas trouble spots. The details are as follows:

May 1994—evacuation from Yemen. Central records for this operation, whose costs lay where they fell, were not kept in 1994.

June 1998—evacuation from Eritrea. The cost of the operation was estimated at around £50K.

December 1998—evacuation from Sierra Leone. The cost of the operation was estimated at around £150K.

Young Servicemen

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the roles which servicemen aged 16 and 17 are not eligible to perform, by service. [81238]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Service personnel who are on the trained strength are fully employable within the limits of their training, their rank or rating. Personnel aged under 17 are not deployed operationally, nor do they undertake operational patrols in Northern Ireland. Personnel aged under 18 are not deployed on UN peacekeeping operations in line with UN policy on the matter, although should a Royal Navy unit already serving overseas deploy at short notice on peacekeeping duties, it might contain a small number of personnel aged under 18.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many enlisted 16 and 17 year olds there are in each service. [81241]

Mr. Doug Henderson: At 1 March 1999, the numbers of 16 and 17 year old personnel serving in the UK Regular Armed Forces can be broken down as follows:

Age	*Total*	*Naval Service*	*Army*	*Royal Air Force*
16	1,559	253	1,235	71
17	5,069	776	3,914	379
Total	6,628	1,029	5,149	450

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy towards the recruitment of under 18 year olds to the Armed Forces. [81239]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *571*.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many 16 and 17 year old servicemen are currently deployed overseas, by (i) service and (ii) theatre; and how many have been removed from their unit on its current deployment. [81236]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The details of Service personnel deployed overseas, by Service, are as follows:

Naval Service. No Royal Navy personnel aged 16 are presently deployed overseas. There are 53 Royal Navy personnel (including seven women) aged 17 deployed overseas with the Fleet. Their locations are as follows:

Adriatic: 21

Far East: 4

Gulf: 6

Mediterranean: 15

South Atlantic: 3

West Indies: 4.

There are no 16 or 17-year-old Royal Marine personnel serving overseas.

Army. As at 1 March 1999, no Army personnel aged 16 were deployed overseas. Some 133 personnel aged 17 were deployed overseas as follows:

Botswana: 1

Belize: 4

Canada: 2

Cyprus: 16

Gibraltar: 4

Kenya: 18

American Territories: 1

Germany: 56

USA: 9

Former Yugoslavia: 22

Royal Air Force. As at 1 March 1999, no Service personnel aged 16 were deployed overseas. One 17-year-old was serving in Saudi Arabia.

There is no record of personnel having been removed from their unit prior to its current deployment.

Kosovo

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the planned deployment of Territorial Army (i) units and (ii) individual personnel in Kosovo; and what reassessment he is making of the Strategic Defence Review following the engagement of British troops in the Balkans. [81251]

Mr. George Robertson: There are no plans to deploy units of the Territorial Army (TA) to Kosovo. Our policy is that TA commitments in the Balkans should continue to be met by individuals on a voluntary basis. The principles which underpin the Strategic Defence Review remain valid, and are not affected by the current deployment in the Balkans. However, full account will be taken of any lessons learned.

Wellington Barracks Electronic Range Simulator

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the reduction of access to Wellington Barracks Electronic Range Simulator. [81247]

Mr. Doug Henderson: There has been no change in the policy regarding access to the small arms trainer (SAT) at Wellington Barracks, although more units are using it now that the similar facility at Chelsea has been transferred to Hounslow. SAT operators from the resident battalion have been away on overseas training and this may have reduced access temporarily.

Military Training

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries *(a)* from which police officers have visited the UK and *(b)* have been visited by United Kingdom military personnel to receive training or other military assistance under the Defence Military Assistance Fund since 1 April 1997. [81378]

Mr. Doug Henderson: From 6 to 13 December 1997, a member of the Export Support Team (Royal Engineers) visited the Royal Malaysian Police Bomb Disposal Unit to provide after sales training in equipment used in bomb disposal operations.

Emergency Rations

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the constituents of the emergency rations issued to Army personnel in the field. [81350]

Mr. Spellar: Personnel deployed in the field are normally fed using Operational Ration Packs when fresh food supply is not practicable or in the period before a fresh food supply chain can be established. The rations replicate normal feeding patterns by providing breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks together with hot and cold drinks and are designed either for consumption under group feeding arrangements or for issue to the individual. There are currently seven menu variations. The ration packs can have up to 24 components, which vary depending on the ration type and the menu. The constituents range from ancillaries such as can openers and toilet tissue through snack items, such as biscuits and beverage sachets, to main meal items of meat and vegetables and a dessert.

War Pensions

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the review of the War Pensions Scheme. [81484]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The War Pensions Scheme is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

The MOD and DSS are currently reviewing arrangements for compensation service personnel or their bereaved where disablement or death is due to service in the Forces. The aim is to make proposals for a new compensation scheme that could replace the current War Pension Scheme and the attributable provisions of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. The War Pension Scheme would, however, remain available for those who have already left the Armed Forces including current war pensioners.

We expect the review to report in the Summer. A separate review is being conducted into the main provision of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme, for which the Secretary of State for Defence is responsible. We expect recommendations to emerge around the end of this year.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the United Kingdom submissions for the NATO fiftieth anniversary meeting to be held in Washington on 23 to

25 April; and if he will make a statement on the submissions made by *(a)* Germany and *(b)* Canada on the role of nuclear weapons within the NATO force structure. [81573]

Mr. George Robertson: The United Kingdom has played a full part in the confidential consideration between Allies of the various issues which will be discussed at the forthcoming NATO Summit. As is normal, the details of the UK contribution to such international negotiations are not made public and I am therefore withholding the information requested under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information—defence, security and international relations.

The principles underlying the Government's approach have been set out in evidence given by me, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and senior officials to the Defence Select Committee's inquiry into the future of NATO, published on 13 April in the Committee's Third Report of Session 1998–99 (HC 39), as well as in debates and in answers to Questions in both Houses. I have also made a number of speeches, which are available on the Ministry of Defence's World Wide Web site, http:/www.mod/uk.

The views of other Allies on NATO issues are a matter for the Governments concerned.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out under which headings in his Departmental cash plans contained in Cm 4208, nuclear weapons *(a)* procurement, *(b)* deployment, *(c)* storage and *(d)* related maintenance activities are contained. [81499]

Mr. George Robertson: Costs relating to nuclear weapons procurement are contained in Vote 1 subheads K and L. Costs associated with the storage of nuclear weapons and related maintenance activities are contained in Vote 1 subhead F. Vote 1 subhead A covers the front line operating costs of the deterrent.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received recently from Abolition 2000 in respect of NATO's nuclear weapon policy and the NATO review meeting due to be held on 23 to 25 April in Washington DC. [81574]

Mr. George Robertson: Several officials in my Department have received copies of an identical letter, sent by Mr. Frank Blackaby of Abolition 2000 on 6 April 1999, concerning NATO nuclear policy and the review of the Alliance's Strategic Concept.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made by Russia and the United States in ratification of the Start II Nuclear Arms Control Treaty. [81478]

Mr. George Robertson: The United States Senate ratified START II on 26 January 1996. The Russian Duma has yet to do so.

Peacekeeping Policy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with other members of the European Union on developing a peacekeeping and crisis management policy. [81428]

Mr. George Robertson: In the context of the debate on further arrangements for European security and defence launched by the Prime Minister last autumn, European Union Member States have agreed to strengthen the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including through the development of a security and defence capacity. EU activities envisaged in this field are set out in the Amsterdam Treaty, and include humanitarian and rescue tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking. I have had a variety of discussions with all EU partners, and NATO Allies on the means by which we might give effect to this.

NATO Summit

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the agenda for the forthcoming NATO summit on 24 to 25 April. [81490]

Mr. George Robertson: The scheduling of meetings, and the topics to be discussed at each one, during the NATO Summit, are still under consideration. Besides discussing the situation in the Balkans NATO's Heads of State and Government, Foreign and Defence Ministers, and colleagues from member countries of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, will have a substantial range of issues to consider and important decisions will be taken on the continuing adaptation of NATO to meet the challenges of the future.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what weapons using depleted uranium have been sent with British military forces involved in the NATO military action against Yugoslavia; and what *(a)* depleted uranium shells and *(b)* other missiles using depleted shells have been used in the conflict. [81582]

Mr. George Robertson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) on 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *43*.

Trident

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the cost of the Trident Acquisition programme; and if he will make a statement. [81950]

Mr. George Robertson: The current estimate of the total acquisition cost of the Trident programme, with payments already made expressed at the prices and exchange rates actually incurred and future spend at the rates assumed in the latest long-term costing of the Defence programme (the hybrid estimate), is now £9,756 million. Leaving aside the effects of price inflation and exchange rate variation (+£21 million and -£1 million respectively), there has been a real cost reduction since last year of £52 million. Expenditure on the Trident acquisition programme to 30 September 1998 represented some 94 per cent. of this estimate. If all expenditure, past and projected, is brought up to the latest long-term costing conditions (the non-hybrid estimate) the estimate is £12,870 million.

Estimate table (hybrid)

£ million

	US	*UK*	*Total*
Previous estimate (July 1998) at 1997–98 economic conditions (1 = $1.6137)	2,911	6,877	9,788
Real changes	−42	−10	−52
Price Inflation on unspent balance	+5	+16	+21
Exchange Rate Variation	−1	n/a	−1
Revised Estimate at 1998–99 economic conditions (£1 = $1.6269)	2,873	6,883	9,756

Estimate table (non-hybrid)

£ million

	US	*UK*	*Total*
Previous estimate (July 1998) at 1997–98 economic conditions (1 = $1.6137)	3,443	9,077	12,520
Real changes	−42	−10	−52
Price Inflation	+75	+356	+430
Exchange Rate Variation	−28	n/a	−28
Revised Estimate at 1998–99 economic conditions (£1 = $1.6269)	3,448	9,423	12,870

Note:
Figures rounded to nearest £ million hence any apparent imbalances.

The programme also continues to show an overall reduction in real terms on its original 1982 estimate. This reduction, including the savings resulting from the decision to process missiles at the United States facility at Kings Bay, Georgia now stands at over £3.7 billion at current prices.

The proportion of the estimate for work undertaken in the United Kingdom is a little over 70 per cent.

Our three in-service Vanguard class submarines have successfully maintained a continuous at-sea deterrent. HMS Vengeance, the fourth of the class, was rolled out last September and is scheduled to enter operational service in two years' time.

Reserve Forces

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Associations. [81951]

Mr. Spellar: The future structure of the Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Associations (TAVRAs) has been the subject of a joint study involving the TAVRAs themselves and the Ministry of Defence. I have accepted the joint recommendation of the Commander in Chief Land Command and Chairman of the Council of TAVRAs, to set in hand new arrangements to ensure that the areas of responsibility of TAVRAs in England are aligned to those of Government office regions. Arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be unchanged. As a result, there will be a reduction in the number of Associations from the present 14 to 13. This reduction will be achieved by the amalgamation of the South East and Eastern Wessex Associations to form a new Association covering the counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Responsibility for carrying out the Eastern Wessex Association's current functions in Dorset will transfer to the Western Wessex Association. This robust and coherent structure recognises the essential tri-Service nature of the TAVRAs, who provide an essential link between the community and the Armed Forces, whilst the changes to the financial arrangements that accompany it will promote a closer working partnership between the TAVRAs who administer the volunteer estate, and the Army's regional command structure, which will command Territorial Army units themselves.

The TAVRAs are established under the Reserve Forces Act of 1996, and these changes will be presented to the House in due course; we expect them to be complete by April 2002.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set up a co-ordinating committee to oversee liaison between the National Health Service and Defence Medical Services. [80309]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Following the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 14 December 1998, *Official Report*, column *329*, National Health Service representatives have been appointed to the two new senior management boards to ensure effective liaison between the Defence Medical Services and the National Health Service.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Crowd Recognition Devices

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to restrict exports of crowd recognition devices for identifying individuals at rallies to countries identified as having limited human rights. [81041]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Government do not control the export of crowd recognition devices for identifying individuals at rallies or other such events. If the hon. Member believes there is sufficient justification for the Government to consider the introduction of such a control, we would look at these arguments without prejudice to any decision.

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *684*, how many times Ministers in his Department met their counterparts in the US Administration between 1 January 1998 and 1 June 1998, indicating the dates and locations of each meeting, the Ministers involved and the name of the US counterpart. [80817]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Foreign Office Ministers have frequent contact with members of the US Administration in the United States, in the UK and elsewhere overseas.

The Foreign Secretary visited Washington from 15–16 January 1998 and had formal meetings with Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State, who was accompanied by Tom Pickering (Under Secretary for Political Affairs), Stuart Eizenstat (Under Secretary for Economics, Business and Agricultural Affairs), James Rubin (State Department Spokesman), Marc Grossman (Assistant Secretary for European and Canadian Affairs), Donald Bandler (Senior Director for European Affairs at the National Security Council), Anthony Wayne (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Canadian Affairs), David Welch (Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs); he also had talks with Sandy Berger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. No other FCO Ministers visited the United States between 1 January 1998 and 1 June 1998.

As stated in my previous answer, the information the hon. Member requires on meetings which have taken place between FCO Ministers and their approximate US counterparts in the UK and third countries is not held centrally, and to obtain it would incur disproportionate costs.

Kosovo

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had with the Secretary of State for International Development concerning the reception of refugees in Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, before NATO's offensive on Yugoslavia. [80763]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Foreign Office Ministers and officials have remained in close contact with the Department for International Development and other Government Departments since the crisis in Kosovo began last year.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on a future role for the International Criminal Court in Kosovo following cessation of hostilities. [81250]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The International Criminal Court will not have jurisdiction over events occurring prior to its establishment. However, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is mandated to prosecute those responsible for serious violations of humanitarian law throughout the territory of the former Yugoslavia. We are doing all we can to assist the Tribunal with its investigations. It will be important that its staff are given full access to Kosovo once the military action is over so that they may conduct a thorough investigation into the atrocities that are allegedly occurring there.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the report by the UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone concerning alleged civil rights abuses by the Economic Community of West Africa States Monitoring Group; and what representations he has made on the report. [81242]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We fully support the efforts made by ECOMOG to protect the civilian population of Sierra Leone from rebel atrocities. Nevertheless, we view with concern any reports of abuses by ECOMOG forces, including those reported by the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone. We have made our views clear on this to ECOMOG and to the Government of Sierra Leone. The abuses described by UNOMSIL, and any other such reports, should be fully investigated.

We welcome the Nigerian Government's public commitment that ECOMOG will continue to operate in accordance with international humanitarian law and that it will take disciplinary measures against any offenders.

On 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *35*, I gave details of the further assistance which we are providing to support ECOMOG's efforts to protect the people and the democratically elected Government of Sierra Leone. We have secured assurances from ECOMOG that this equipment will be used only in accordance with internationally acceptable human rights standards and humanitarian law. We have made it clear to ECOMOG that our support is conditional on ECOMOG and the Government of Sierra Leone respecting human rights.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 31 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *692*, on the Western European Union, on which dates the French and Greek Governments deposited instruments of ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam; and on which day it will come into force. [81443]

Ms Quin: The Greek and French Governments deposited their instruments of ratification on 23 and 30 March 1999 respectively.

The Treaty of Amsterdam will enter into force on 1 May 1999.

Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment has been made of the proposals put forward by *(a)* South Africa, *(b)* Egypt, *(c)* Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Norway, collectively, *(d)* Canada and *(e)* Group of 21 to the United Nations current Conference on Disarmament, in respect of nuclear disarmament; what support has been given by Britain to each proposal; and

what proposals on nuclear disarmament have been submitted to the United Nations current Conference on Disarmament by the United Kingdom. [81569]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The highest priority for the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in 1999 is that negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty should begin in earnest. We therefore wish to see the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee set up in 1998 for this purpose. Such a treaty is the internationally agreed next step towards nuclear disarmament.

Because the CD operates by consensus, the agreement of all participating countries on a work plan for the year must be obtained before substantive discussions can begin. We have therefore assessed all proposals made so far in the light of the prospects of their attracting such consensus support. Regrettably, none has yet done so. We will continue to press for a formula on which all can agree.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with the Government of Gibraltar concerning the enfranchisement of Gibraltarians for European elections; and if he will make a statement. [81426]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 20 April 1999]:* We have kept the Government of Gibraltar fully informed at each stage of the steps we are taking to secure the EP vote for Gibraltarians. We tabled the text of our proposed amendment to the 1976 EC Act on Direct Elections in the General Affairs Group on 16 March. Our proposal is to add the words "and Gibraltar" to Annex II of the Act.

SCOTLAND

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland were in residential care homes in the most recent year for which figures are available aged *(a)* 60 to 64 years, *(b)* 65 to 74 years, *(c)* 75 to 84 years and *(d)* 85 years of age and over; and in each of those categories how many were funded by (i) the local authority on a means tested basis, (ii) the individuals themselves and (iii) the Department of Social Security through preserved rights. [77138]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 22 March 1999]:* The numbers, by age, in residential care homes are given in Table A. The figures relate to 1996–97 and are provided by residential care homes on a statistical return to The Scottish Office.

Information on source of financial support is available only for residents in private and voluntary sector homes. The figures given in Table B relate to 1996–97 and are provided by residential care homes on a statistical return to The Scottish Office.

Table A: Number of people in residential care homes in Scotland by age (over 60 only) as at 31 March 1997

Age	Local authority run residential care homes	Private and voluntary run residential care homes	Total
60–64	128	434	562
65–74	806	1,103	1,909
75–84	2,411	2,558	4,969
85+	3,344	4,289	7,633
Total	6,689	8,384	15,073

Table B: Financial support to residents in private and voluntary run residential care homes in Scotland by age (over 60 only) as at 31 March 1997

Age	Number funded by private means	Number retaining right to higher level of income support (pre 1 April 1993) and balance of charges met by private means	Number retaining right to higher level of income support (pre 1 April 1993) and balance of charges met by LA	Number receiving standard level of income support (post 1 April 1993) and balance of charges met by private means or LA	Number funded by Health Board	Total
60–64 years	16	141	126	122	1	406
65–74 years	134	348	159	369	7	1,017
75–84 years	676	584	115	1,011	18	2,404
85+ years	1,517	991	179	1,295	44	4,026
Total	2,343	2,064	579	2,797	70	7,853

Note:
The financial support of 531 residents aged 60 or over in private/voluntary run residential care homes is unknown.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Timber Industry

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures his Department has taken to stabilise the price of softwood timber in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [77206]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 23 March 1999]:* None.

EU Grants

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many claims for the payment of *(a)* European Regional Development Fund and *(b)* Social Fund grants in Scotland

dating from (i) before 1994, (ii) 1994, (iii) 1995, (iv) 1996, (v) 1997 and (vi) 1998 are still unpaid; and what is the total sum involved for each year. [79919]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 20 April 1999]:* At 31 March 1999, the unpaid ERDF and ESF claims with my Department were as set out in the table:

	Number	*Amount (£)*
ERDF		
Pre-1994	23	318,087
1994	5	275,768
1995	20	1,048,450
1996	66	908,310
1997	18	552,735
1998	268	8,513,577
ESF		
Pre-1994	0	0
1994	0	0
1995	0	0
1996	32	7,234,989
1997	48	5,465,446
1998	651	25,826,251

Of the ERDF claims, some 173 have been delayed because the claims are subject of queries, or where the applicants are due to refund payments or other grants to the Department, or where there are other technical reasons why the claims are currently invalid for payment. In addition, the 28 claims from pre-1994 and 1994 relate to old pre-1994 programmes which became liable for payment only in February of this year. They will of course be paid as soon as possible. Most of the unpaid ESF claims for 1996 and 1997 relate to Government sector training programmes final payments for which, in terms of the appropriate European Regulations, are not due until after 31 March 1999. The unpaid 1998 claims largely comprise final claims, which could be submitted only after 31 December 1998, and are currently being processed by the Department in the normal way.

From 1 July 1999, the administration of European Structural Funds will be the responsibility of the Scottish Administration.

Pharmacists' Remuneration

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what categories of expenditure are included under *(a)* general pharmaceutical services and *(b)* non-cash limited pharmacists' remuneration for the year 1999–2000. [80665]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 20 April 1999]:* Pharmaceutical Services consist primarily of the supply of drugs and appliances prescribed by general practitioners. Reimbursements for drugs and appliances account for over 80 per cent. of the gross cost of the services. Fees to pharmacists and other dispensing practitioners make up most of the remainder. Income from prescription charges collected from patients is offset against these costs.

Non cash-limited pharmacists' remuneration comprises the fees paid to community pharmacists for dispensing prescriptions and most other pharmaceutical services. Some expenditure on locally managed pharmaceutical services is cash-limited.

In 1999–2000, expenditure on drugs and appliances is covered by Health Boards' cash-limited allocations. Health Boards do not receive a pre-determined allocation for non cash-limited expenditure.

Food and Agriculture Organisation

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his Department's contribution to the Food and Agriculture Organisation meeting in Rome; and if he will deposit ministerial speeches made in the forum in the Library. [80450]

Mr. Macdonald: Lord Sewel attended the Food and Agriculture Organisation's Ministerial meeting on forestry on 8 and 9 March. He reiterated the UK's commitment to sustainable forest management and outlined the measures we have implemented and are planning to implement on sustainable forestry. He also suggested steps that the international community should take, in preparation for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development next year, to promote sustainable management of forests throughout the world. I have arranged for a copy of Lord Sewel's statement to be placed in the Library along with a copy of the 'Rome Declaration on Forestry' which was adopted at the meeting.

Infectious Salmon Anaemia

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list up to the latest available date *(a)* each instance of Infectious Salmon Anaemia, *(b)* its location, *(c)* the date reported to his Department and *(d)* if in wild or farmed salmon, in seatrout or other salmonoid; and what measures he has taken, or is taking, to (i) control and (ii) eliminate the condition; and if he has determined how ISA was introduced to Scottish waters. [80872]

Mr. Macdonald: To date, Infectious Salmon Anaemia (ISA) has been confirmed on 10 seawater farmed salmon sites, as follows:

Site	*Date of ISA confirmation*
Loch Nevis B, Argyll	15 May 1998
Loch Greshornish, Skye	16 May 1998
Loch Nevis A, Argyll	9 June 1998
Loch Creran A, Argyll	9 June 1998
Loch Creran C, Argyll	9 June 1998
Loch Creran B, Argyll	17 June 1998
Shuna, Argyll	24 July 1998
Lismore A, Argyll	24 July 1998
Mangaster Voe, Shetland	27 August 1998
Loch Nevis C, Argyll	18 September 1998

Confirmation of the presence of ISA is based on clinical signs and laboratory tests. The current outbreak is the first in the European Community and legislation requires its elimination from our waters. The measures taken include clearance of the fish from infected farms, disinfection of equipment and fallowing for at least 6 months. In conjunction with official monitoring and sampling of fish, permission is required for movements of fish, equipment etc, into and out of farms in the same water catchment area as infected farms and fish

movements are regulated in surrounding surveillance areas. An investigation into the source of the outbreak continues.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Arable Area Payment Scheme

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the payment per hectare in sterling under the arable area payment scheme for *(a)* cereals, *(b)* set-aside, *(c)* pulses, *(d)* oilseed rape and *(e)* linseed for each year from 1999–2000 to 2005–06, using current exchange rates. [81371]

Mr. Macdonald: Using the rate of exchange with the euro which applied on 15 April 1999 (£0.6667/euro), payment rates under the Arable Area Payments Scheme in Scotland would be as follows:

(£/ha)

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03 onwards*
LFA				
Cereals	188.75	203.79	218.83	218.83
Set-aside	239.08	203.79	218.83	218.83
Pulses	272.63	251.83	251.83	251.83
Oilseed rape	347.80	301.91	267.30	218.83
Linseed	365.06	306.57	262.70	218.83
Non-LFA				
Cereals	205.42	221.78	238.15	238.15
Set-aside	260.19	221.78	238.15	238.15
Pulses	296.71	274.07	274.07	274.07
Oilseed rape	422.50	366.76	324.72	238.15
Linseed	397.30	333.64	285.89	238.15

The payment rates will be subject to the EU-prescribed penalties should there be a base area overshoot in the LFA or Non-LFA.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Fish Statistics

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the percentage of salmon and grilse caught by anglers in Scotland in each of the last 10 years which were caught by *(a)* persons permanently resident in Scotland and *(b)* anglers visiting Scotland. [81219]

Mr. Macdonald: The number of salmon and grilse caught in Scotland is set out in the table.

Number

Year	*Salmon*			*Grilse*	*Salmon and Grilse*	*Sea trout*
	January to April	*May to December*	*Annual*			
1988	10,250	58,429	68,679	27,809	96,488	47,846
1989	7,290	51,048	58,338	29,669	88,007	42,519
1990	7,231	45,049	52,280	19,366	71,646	27,830
1991	6,577	38,559	45,136	17,314	62,450	27,500
1992	6,530	48,496	55,026	27,871	82,897	34,315
1993	5,785	45,516	51,301	28,176	79,477	33,454
1994	6,203	46,804	53,007	23,820	76,827	29,238
1995	6,332	44,854	51,186	22,803	73,989	30,694
1996	5,964	33,439	39,403	19,766	59,169	32,713
1997	4,580	27,440	32,020	17,757	49,777	27,742

Information on the residency of anglers is not available centrally.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the value to the Scottish economy of salmon farming in each of the last 10 years. [81217]

Mr. Macdonald: Annual production figures for the last 10 years are:

Year	*Tonnes*
1988	17,951
1989	28,553
1990	32,351
1991	40,593
1992	36,101
1993	48,691
1994	64,066
1995	70,060
1996	83,121
1997	99,197
1998	[1]115,483

[1] Estimate

Information on the value of annual production is not held centrally but a recently published study "The Economic Impact of Scottish Salmon Farming" estimated that in 1996 the turnover of salmon farmers was £248 million and of processors in Scotland £227 million. The study also estimated that the industry supported directly and indirectly 6,422 full time equivalent jobs. Copies of the study have been placed in the library.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Health Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the incidence is of *(a)* leukaemia, *(b)* breast cancer,

(c) other forms of cancer and *(d)* foetal abnormalities amongst women (i) in Inverclyde and (ii) elsewhere in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [81128]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 20 April 1999]:* The information in regard to *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* is set out in the following table:

Numbers of cases and incidence rates for women resident in Inverclyde Council area and the rest of Scotland in the period 1987–1996

	Area	
	Inverclyde	*Rest of Scotland*
Breast cancer		
Number of cases	522	29,817
Rate[2]	93.2	101.2
Leukaemia		
Number of cases	40	2,371
Rate[2]	6.0	7.0
Other invasive neoplasms[1]		
Number of cases	1,761	88,441
Rate[2]	273.5	257.5

[1] Excludes non-melanoma skin cancer

[2] European age-standardised rate per 100,000

The information available on foetal abnormalities relates to births and therapeutic abortions where the condition of the foetus was recorded, excluding pregnancies ending in miscarriage. On this basis, in the year ending March 1998 there were 23 pregnancies in Inverclyde Council area and 3,035 pregnancies in the Rest of Scotland where a congenital anomaly was recorded. These figures imply rates of 126.7 and 281.7 respectively, per 100,000 population of women between 15 and 44.From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

HIV

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *222–24*, if he will set out for each group of people tested, whether *(a)* their consent was sought for entry and *(b)* they were informed that they were to be entered into an anonymised HIV prevalence survey. [80714]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 20 April 1999]:* The programme of unlinked anonymous HIV testing was introduced in the UK in 1989, in accordance with World Health Organisation international guidelines for its global programme on AIDS, on the basis that specific informed consent is not required. However, in clinical settings where such testing is undertaken, this should be made clear to attenders by the use of posters and leaflets, which should also indicate that any person not wishing to have their sample tested in this way may refuse permission. Appropriate posters and leaflets are provided in antenatal care settings and in genito-urinary medicine clinics.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Kosovo Refugees

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will estimate the number of refugees who have fled Kosovo in the past three weeks; and if she will make a statement. [80924]

Clare Short: According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees over 660,000 people have left Kosovo in the last three weeks. Of these, 359,000 have found refuge in Albania, over 132,000 in Macedonia, 73,000 in Montenegro and over 32,000 in Bosnia. Over 15,000 of the refugees have been taken to countries outside the region including Turkey, Germany and Norway. And according to unconfirmed reports, some 50,000 people have moved from Kosovo to Serbia.

Balkan Aid

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the additional British aid given to Albania and the former Yugoslavia as a result of the current Kosovo crisis; and if she will make a statement. [80926]

Clare Short: The British Government have committed an additional £20 million since 24 March for humanitarian action in response to the current crisis in Kosovo. Most of this funding is being used to help the Kosovo refugees in Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro. A briefing note giving further details of the assistance provided by the Department for International Development has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Cambodia

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will list the main expenditure items in respect of aid to Cambodia for 1998–99; [80887]

(2) what is the estimated UK aid expenditure on Cambodia for *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 1999–2000. [80885]

Clare Short: The estimated expenditure in Cambodia for 1998–99 is £7 million. This is in support of a programme in health, education, urban poverty, rehabilitation, humanitarian de-mining, elections and the programmes of international non-governmental organisations. Planned expenditure for 1999–2000 is £5 million. A Country Strategy Paper for Cambodia is being developed and will be published later this year.

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 17 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *671*, on meetings with US counterparts, if she will list the dates and locations of her meetings with the head of USAID since 1 November 1998. [80818]

Clare Short: Since 1 November 1998 to date, I have had no meetings with the head of USAID although I have spoken to him on the telephone.

Professional Statisticians

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff who have worked as professional statisticians in her Department and its predecessor have left on early retirement in each of the past 10 years. [81176]

Clare Short: One professional statistician left on early retirement in 1997.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff by grade are employed as professional statisticians in her Department; how many of these staff have been accepted as fast stream by the Civil Service Selection Board; and how many have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society. [81198]

Clare Short: My Department has 13 professional statisticians, in the following grades:

Grade	*Number*
Chief Statistician (Senior Civil Service)	1
Senior Statistician (former Grade 6)	1
Statistician (former Grade 7)	9
Temporary Assistant Statistician	2

Eleven have passed the Civil Service Selection Board and 2 hold chartered status with the Royal Statistical Society

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the total number of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76832]

Mr. Chris Smith: Between 2 May 1997 and 28 February 1999, my Special Advisers have made visits on four occasions in an official capacity. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Millennium Dome (Sponsorship)

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much of the sponsorship secured for the Dome takes the form of cash payments *(a)* for construction work and *(b)* for other purposes; and what is the estimated value of gifts in kind. [78378]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 23 March 1999]:* Each of the arrangements with individual sponsors differs in terms of the level of support for exhibit zones; associated National Programme activities and other aspects of the Millennium Experience. There is no direct correlation between the source of income and payment of invoices for particular aspects of the project. NMEC has been successful in achieving the majority of its sponsorship income target.

NMEC are currently preparing their accounts for the 1998–99 financial year for audit. To publish unaudited accounts would leave them open to misinterpretation. NMEC's audited accounts for 1998–99, which will differentiate between the cash and value-in-kind components of sponsorship, will be published in due course. NMEC does not accept gifts in kind.

British Open Squash Championship

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received concerning the cancellation of the British Open Squash Championship 1999. [81345]

Mr. Banks: I have not received any representations concerning the cancellation of the British Open Squash Championship 1999 which was due to be held in March. The Sports Councils are working closely with the Squash Rackets Association, the event organisers, who are hopeful of staging the event in November of this year at a venue yet to be confirmed.

World Tourism Organisation

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the benefits of the United Kingdom becoming a member of the World Tourism Organisation. [81401]

Janet Anderson: My Department consulted other relevant Government Departments and the British Tourist Authority last year about the advantages of joining the World Tourism Organisation. We concluded that UK membership would not represent best use of the money available to support tourism.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Failed Asylum Seekers

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current size of the backlog of failed asylum seekers liable for removal; and by when he expects that backlog to be cleared. [78664]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* As at November 1998, the latest date for which a figure is available, the estimated backlog of failed asylum seekers liable for removal was 24,000. That figure represents a snapshot, taken from Immigration and Nationality Directorate port and enforcement databases, of failed asylum seekers, excluding dependants, who have exhausted their rights of appeal (including any who did not submit an appeal against the refusal of asylum) and who are liable for removal.

The backlog figure includes a number of cases where there are one or more barriers to removal such as absconding, judicial review or lack of documentation. Therefore, it is unlikely ever to be the case that the whole of the backlog will be cleared. In light of the unpredictable influence that legal and other barriers exert on the removal process, it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of when the backlog is likely to be cleared. However, we made clear in the Immigration and Asylum White Paper our commitment to strengthen enforcement of immigration controls. We have already taken a number of steps to deliver that commitment and further measures are included in the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

Some 12,500 failed asylum seekers were removed or departed voluntarily between May 1997 and February 1999. This number is greater than the combined annual totals for 1993 to 1996.

Deportation Orders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deportation orders were *(a)* signed and *(b)* enforced in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [78636]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 29 March 1999]:* The information requested is given in the table. It should be noted that some deportation orders may not be immediately executable because of legal reasons, or other barriers to removal such as absconding, and that in some cases where a deportation order has been signed, it is later decided that deportation is no longer appropriate. The Government will further reduce the use of Deportation Orders under the Immigration and Asylum Bill by increasing the use of administrative removal.

Deportation action 1996–98 [1]

Number of persons

	Deportation orders signed	*Deportation orders enforced* [2]
1996	1,880	900
1997	1,200	820
1998[1]	980	690

[1] 1998 data are provisional

[2] A deportation order enforced in one year may have been signed in an earlier year. It should be noted that some deportation orders may not be immediately executable because of legal reasons, or other barriers to removal such as absconding, and that in some cases where a deportation order has been signed it is later decided that deportation is no longer appropriate.

Note:

All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Methylamphetamine

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many seizures of methylamphetamine have been made by *(a)* police and *(b)* HM Customs, in the last 10 years; and what was the total quantity seized. [79902]

Mr. George Howarth: Figures for the number of seizures of methylamphetamine made by the police and Customs and submitted to the Forensic Science Service for analysis between 1995 and 1998 are given in the table. It should be noted that full information is not available for 1996 and 1997. Equivalent figures for earlier years can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Not all seizures of controlled drugs are necessarily submitted for analysis. Details of all seizures, whether analysed or not, can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Until late 1997, methylamphetamine represented less than 0.1 per cent. of all amphetamine cases in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the amounts seized (mostly white powders) were generally small with typical purities of less than 10 per cent. The weight of tablets varies but is typically in the range 250–300 milligrams and perhaps has a drug content of 5 per cent.

Use of this substance is very rare in Europe but is more prevalent in the United States of America and Japan.

Seizures of methylamphetamine submitted to the Forensic Science Service for analysis by police and Customs 1995–98

Year	*Number of seizures*	*Quantity seized*
Police		
1995	12	309 grams, 1 tablet
1996	7	23 grams, 25 tablets
1997	(April-December only) 34	Less than 7 grams, 743 tablets
1998	81	7.75 grams, 4,955 tablets (includes one seizure of 3,000 tablets and another of 400 tablets)
Customs		
1995	Not available	Not available
1996	(July-December only) 1	0.96 grams
1997	0	0
1998	2	19.24 grams

Source:

Forensic Science Service

Heroin and Cocaine

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the proportion of *(a)* heroin and *(b)* cocaine seized in the last 12 months for which figures are available, with a degree of purity of (i) less than 20 per cent., (ii) 20 to 30 per cent., (iii) 30 to 40 per cent., (iv) 40 to 50 per cent., (v) 50 to 60 per cent. and (vi) 60 per cent. and above; and what quantity was seized in each band. [79898]

Mr. George Howarth: Figures for the purity of heroin and cocaine submitted for analysis to the Forensic Science Service in 1997, the last year for which data are available, are given in the tables. The figures have been broken down by type of enforcement agency since the amounts seized in each purity band are only readily available for Customs. Further information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. It should be noted that only a small proportion of drugs seized are submitted for forensic analysis.

Purity of heroin submitted for analysis to the Forensic Science Service by police and Customs, for specific bands, 1997

Percentage purity	*Police* *Number of seizures*	*Police* *Percentage of FSS total*	*Police* *Quantity seized (grams)*	*Customs* *Number of seizures*	*Customs* *Percentage of FSS total*	*Customs* *Quantity seized (grams)*
Less than 20	165	14	—	13	16	161,798
20–29	250	21	—	16	20	40,799
30–39	272	23	—	13	16	111,978
40–49	277	23	—	11	14	437,077
50–59	185	15	—	17	21	84,742
60 and over	57	5	—	11	14	261,723
Total submitted to FSS	1,206	100	—	81	100	1,098,117
UK total	12,311		488,700	163		1,747,200

Sources:

Forensic Science Service; and Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (UK totals)

Purity of cocaine submitted for analysis to the Forensic Science Service by police and Customs, for specific bands, 1997

	Police			Customs		
Percentage purity	*Number of seizures*	*Percentage of FSS total*	*Quantity seized (grams)*	*Number of seizures*	*Percentage of FSS total*	*Quantity seized (grams)*
Less than 20	39	6	—	1	less than 1	309
20–29	66	10	—	5	1	3,592
30–39	78	12	—	12	3	15,714
40–49	94	15	—	18	4	24,070
50–59	81	13	—	55	12	49,897
60 and over	275	43	—	385	81	1,519,438
Total submitted to FSS	633	100	—	476	100	1,613,021
UK total	3,003		279,000	684		2,071,200

Sources:
Forensic Science Service; and Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (UK totals)

Amphetamines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the proportion of amphetamines seized in the last 12 months for which figures are available, with a degree of purity of *(a)* less than 5 per cent., *(b)* 5 to 10 per cent., *(c)* 10 to 20 per cent., *(d)* 20 to 30 per cent., *(e)* 30 to 40 per cent., *(f)* 40 to 50 per cent., *(g)* 50 to 60 per cent., *(h)* 60 to 70 per cent. and *(i)* 70 per cent. and above; and what quantity was seized in each band. [79901]

Mr. George Howarth: Figures for the purity of amphetamines submitted for analysis to the Forensic Science Service in 1997, the last year for which data are available, are given in the Table. The figures have been broken down by type of enforcement agency since the amounts sized in each purity band are readily available only for Customs. Further information can be provided only at disproportionate cost. It should be noted that only a small proportion of drugs seized are submitted for forensic analysis.

Purity of amphetamines submitted for analysis to the Forensic Science Service by police and Customs, for specific bands, 1997

	Police			Customs		
Percentage purity	*Number of seizures*	*Percentage of FSS total*	*Quantity seized (grams)*	*Number of seizures*	*Percentage of FSS total*	*Quantity seized (grams)*
Less than 5	553	36	—	2	10	4.6
5–9	371	24	—	2	10	0.6
10–19	254	17	—	2	10	678
20–29	159	10	—	3	14	20,517
30–39	85	6	—	3	14	52,964
40–49	51	3	—	3	14	165,145
50–59	28	2	—	1	5	95,500
60–69	34	2	—	2	10	19,856
70 and over	4	less than 1	—	3	14	14,708
Total submitted to FSS	1,539	100	—	21	100	369,373
UK total	19,429	—	2,260,600	146	—	935,100

Sources:
Forensic Science Service; and Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (UK totals)

Animal Procedures Committee

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the medically qualified members of the Animal Procedures Committee over the last 12 years; [80765]

(2) what plans he has to appoint more medically qualified members to the Animal Procedures Committee. [80764]

Mr. George Howarth: We last made new appointments to the Animal Procedures Committee in December 1998 and have no immediate plans to appoint further new members. Under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, members of the Committee can serve for a maximum of two terms, each of up to four years.

The past and present members of the Animal Procedures Committee over the last 12 years who have held a medical qualification are Mr. J. C. Brice, Professor B. Bridges, Professor A. D. Dyan, Professor S. M. Jennet, Dr. J. G. G. Ledingham, Professor J. F. Martin, and Professor T. R. E. Pilkington.

Professional Statisticians

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many staff by grade are employed as professional statisticians in his Department; how many of these staff have been accepted as fast stream by the Civil Service Selection Board; and how many have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society; [81205]

(2) how many staff who have worked as professional statisticians in his Department have left on early retirement in each of the past 10 years. [81185]

Mr. Straw: Statistical work is undertaken by a range of specialisms such as Research Officers, Scientific Officers and Economists. The following numbers of staff

are currently employed by the Home Office after having been recruited as fast stream professional statisticians by the Civil Service Selection Board.

Senior Civil Service: 3

Grade 6: 3

Grade 7: 16

Assistant Statistician: 7.

In addition, five Statistical Officers are employed in the Executive Officer grade.

Information on the numbers granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society is not available.

The numbers who left on early retirement were:

one in 1996

one in 1998.

EU Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors underlay the length of time between the meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 12 March and his report to the House. [81240]

Kate Hoey: The report was made to the House at the earliest practicable opportunity.

Criminal Justice Act 1993

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the provisions of Part I of the Criminal Justice Act 1993 will come into force. [81939]

Mr. Straw: Part I of the Criminal Justice Act 1993 extends the jurisdiction of the courts in England and Wales over offences of fraud. A Commencement Order was made on 19 April 1999 to bring the provisions of Part I into force on 1 June 1999. Copies of the Commencement Order have been placed in the Library. Similarly jurisdiction to that conferred in Part I already exists in the common law in Scotland, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is making similar provision for Northern Ireland.

Local Government Elections

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will *(a)* provide for all candidates in local elections free post for election addresses, *(b)* have the same polling times for local elections as for parliamentary elections and *(c)* review the guidance given to the media so that the names of candidates in local elections, who are members of local councils, can be given when they are making important statements on behalf of their local authorities. [81130]

Mr. George Howarth: On *(a)*, the Government have no plans to do so at this time. On *(b)*, the Working Party on Electoral Procedures, which I chair, recommended in its interim report of July 1998 that provision should be made in legislation to enable the Home Secretary to approve pilot schemes to explore alternative electoral procedures. Such schemes might include increasing the hours of polling at local elections in line with those at parliamentary elections. On *(c)*, the Government are currently considering, in consultation with the broadcasters and political parties, the provisions in section 93 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 which govern participation in broadcasts by candidates at local and parliamentary elections.

Firearms

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many legally registered firearms have been *(a)* reported stolen, *(b)* found to be missing and *(c)* otherwise separated from (i) private and (ii) public owners in each of the last 10 years; and what percentage that represents of the total number of legally held weapons. [81134]

Mr. Boateng: The information is not available in the form requested. However, figures for the misappropriation of firearms are published annually in Chapter 3 of "Criminal Statistics: England and Wales", copies of which are in the Library.

"Misappropriation" in this context covers firearms stolen, obtained by fraud or forgery, or handled dishonestly but not accidental loss, for which the Home Office does not maintain records. Before 1995, the figures for the misappropriation of firearms were for the number of incidents. A single incident could relate to more than one firearm. From 1995, figures record the number of actual firearms reported as having been misappropriated. The figures cover all firearms including those that do not need to be held on certificate. Details of ownership are not recorded. The totals for each of the last ten years for which figures for England and Wales are available are given in the table.

	Misappropriation of firearms
1988	1,875
1989	1,821
1990	2,089
1991	2,500
1992	2,750
1993	3,190
1994	2,830
1995	3,915
1996	3,679
1997	2,912

Prior to 1995, only estimates of the number of firearms and shotguns held on certificate were recorded centrally. Although details of actual numbers were subsequently recorded, comparing the figures for misappropriated firearms for the last three years against the total number of firearms held on certificate in those years does not provide a reliable estimate of the proportion of lawfully owned firearms that are misappropriated every year. The former figures include firearms that need not be held on certificate (eg air weapons, starting guns and imitation firearms) whilst the latter figures do not cover all lawfully owned firearms (eg they do not cover firearms held by registered dealers, those held by the Crown or those that do not require a certificate). Subject to those significant caveats, the figures given in the table provide a very rough estimate of the proportion of lawfully owned firearms in England and Wales which have been misappropriated since 1995.

	Number of firearms on certificate	Number of firearms misappropriated	Percentage
1995	1,739,400	3,915	0.225
1996	1,753,300	3,679	0.210
1997	1,648,900	2,912	0.177

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the types of (i) public and (ii) private institution falling within his area of responsibility in which individuals aged under 18 years may be trained in the use of firearms; and if he will estimate the numbers of individuals receiving such training in each type of institution in each of the last five years. [81135]

Mr. Straw: There are currently a total of 113 target shooting clubs at schools in England and Wales which have been approved by the Home Office under the terms of section 15 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. All approved clubs are expected to have at least ten members but no record is kept centrally of the number of members at any one time. Nor is any record kept by the Department as to which of these are state and which are private schools.

The Home Office is also responsible for the approval of target shooting clubs other than those based at schools. There are 1,314 clubs approved in England and Wales many of which will have younger members under the age of 18.

Prior to the passage of the Armed Forces Act 1996, the Home Office was responsible for the approval of cadet corps based at schools, colleges and universities. In 1996, there were 600 such corps, of which approximately half were based at schools and likely therefore to have members under 18. The number of individual cadet members at that time is not recorded.

It is not possible on the basis of the information kept to provide an estimate as requested of how many young people have been trained in the use of firearms over the last five years.

Volunteer Vetting (Charges)

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the level of the charge to the Scout Association for use of the Criminal Records Bureau for the purpose of vetting volunteers; and what plans he has to review those charges. [81623]

Mr. Boateng: I have not made an estimate of any additional costs which might accrue to the Scout movement as a result of checks which may be carried out with the Criminal Records Bureau. I understand that the Scout Association has estimated that additional costs of £750,000 per year will accrue to it, but I have no knowledge of the basis on which it has reached this estimate.

TREASURY

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what environmental appraisals of policy his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* started and *(c)* planned. [79624]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), on 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column 66.

Legal Aid (Foreign Workers)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which officials in his Department had discussions with representatives of GJW, and on how many occasions and on what dates concerning the wish by Cape plc to amend the Access to Justice Bill [*Lords*] to ban foreign workers of British companies obtaining legal aid; and whether the statement of the Head of legal aid spending in his Department that the implication of such a multiple claim by foreign nationals on the public purse would be a matter of serious concern was made with the knowledge of Ministers. [78746]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 31 March 1999]:* There have been no such discussions, and no such statement was made.

Road Fund Gas Duty

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of reducing the level of duty on road fuel gas to *(a)* eight pence per kilogram and *(b)* zero. [80016]

Ms Hewitt: Although the revenue from duty on road fuel gas is currently small, cutting the duty rate to either *(a)* 8p per kilogram, consistent with the EU minimum rate, or *(b)* zero would result in switching from other road fuels, which could have a significant revenue cost. Because the extent of such switching is uncertain, it is not possible to provide a precise estimate.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of National Insurance numbers are found on routine inspection to be bogus. [81036]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not known what proportion of National Insurance Numbers (NINOs) are found to be bogus on routine inspection.

The DSS has identified 5,312 NINOs which have been flagged on the Departmental Central index and can no longer be used.

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on developing methods of cross-checking records within the National Insurance Recording System. [81091]

Dawn Primarolo: A person to person link to cross-reference husband and wife is a feature of NIRS2.

Data matching exercises have been used to cross check the validity of National Insurance numbers on NIRs.

A number of pilot exercises have been constructed to cross check details of NI accounts on NIRS. Each of these exercises has contributed to the intelligence needed to establish rules for identifying anomalous NI accounts.

The Benefits Agency presently matches the information on forms P46 completed when an individual starts work. This information is matched against the various DSS benefit systems to identify potential incorrectness.

ISAs (Advertising)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount spent and to be spent in *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 1999–2000 on advertising individual savings account by (i) the National Savings bank, (ii) the Inland Revenue and (iii) other Government Departments and agencies. [80867]

Ms Hewitt: The amounts requested are as follows. The Inland Revenue figures relate to a general awareness campaign for ISAs which was conducted in March and April 1999. National Savings figures relate to the launch of a National Savings ISA product. No Government Department or agency other than the Inland Revenue and National Savings is involved in promoting ISAs.

£

	1998–99	*1999–2000* [3]
Inland Revenue[1]	993,422.64	nil
National Savings[2]	1,445,640	3,052,000

[1] Includes agency fees, production and research costs and the cost of purchasing space in newspapers.
[2] Includes space, airtime, printing and postage costs only. ISA advertising forms part of a larger National Savings rebranding campaign and it is not possible to isolate agency fees and production costs for the ISA component of the campaign with any precision.
[3] Estimated.

Red Book

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will define the expression "poor literacy skills", used in paragraph 1.12 of the Red Book; and if he will provide comparable figures for *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* 1998. [80850]

Dawn Primarolo: Over 1994–95, twelve countries took part in an International Adult Literacy Survey. The ranges of scores achieved by representative samples of each population aged 16 to 65 were grouped into five proficiency levels, of which level 1 indicated people with very poor literacy skills.

Within the UK sample, 21.8 per cent. achieved only level 1 in prose literacy, which was defined as the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from printed texts, whereas the proportion of the German sample at this level was 14.4 per cent.

There are no comparable figures for later years.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the civil servants who reviewed the Red Book to ensure its objectivity; and if he will publish the guidelines on which such judgments are made. [80888]

Dawn Primarolo: The Red Book is a Government document approved by Ministers under the 'Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service' issued by the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the new opportunities referred to in paragraph 1.22 of the Red Book. [80854]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's aim is to ensure that every family and child has the opportunity to fulfil their potential by tackling the causes of inequality of opportunity. It is promoting employment opportunity for parents through the New Deals and by making work pay. This will reduce worklessness, a major cause of childhood disadvantage. It is also investing in early years learning and education to ensure that every child will have the chance to succeed in later life.

Tax and Spending Leaflet

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the costs of *(a)* printing and *(b)* postage of sending a leaflet to every household informing them of tax and spending decisions. [80856]

Dawn Primarolo: The approximate cost of the household leaflet is around £1.5 million but the exact cost will depend on a number of factors, including the way in which it is distributed and the number of households receiving a copy. The cost will be firmed up in the run up to Budget 2000. Any expenditure will be met within the existing spending totals.

Euro

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the annual cost of accepting the payment of taxes in euros. [80669]

Ms Hewitt: Annual costs of accepting tax payments in euro will depend on the level of take-up but recurrent costs are likely to be marginal.

VAT

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the rules relating to the exemption of children's clothes and shoes from VAT were *(a)* introduced and *(b)* last revised. [81384]

Dawn Primarolo: The rules relating to the zero-rating of children's clothing and shoes were introduced on 1 April 1973, and were last revised with effect from 1 April 1994.

Census Returns

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the hon. Members to whom, since 1 October 1998, his Department or the Office for National

Statistics have provided information about restrictions on public access to the census returns for 1921, 1951 and 1961, indicating what information was provided. [81565]

Ms Hewitt: Responses to several hon. Members have been given since 1 October 1998 on matters relating to the restricted access to closed census returns in England and Wales, only two of which were in response to inquiries referring specifically to censuses for the period since 1911. In each case the response given set out the Government's view that, whilst they recognise the sociological value of historical census records, it considers that the strict confidentiality assurances given about present and future censuses would be seriously compromised if it were seen to be departing from the assurances given about censuses in the past.

In the White Paper on the 2001 Census, published on 4 March, the Government confirmed that they have no plans to revise legislation relating to the period of closure of census returns.

Departmental Running Costs

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list gross departmental running costs limits for 1999–2000. [81938]

Mr. Milburn: The gross running costs limit for each Government Department is shown in the table. This table replaces table 3.2 of the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1999–2000 (Cm 4201) which contained some errors.

Gross running costs limits 1999–2000

£000

	Gross expenditure	*Allowable receipts*	*Gross running costs limit*
Department for Education and Employment[1]	1,082,444	−40,034	1,042,410
financed by the Windfall Tax	*177,699*	*−15,000*	*162,699*
Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England	34,550	−324	34,226
Department of Health	283,164	−3,224	279,940
Office of Water Services	11,591	0	11,591
Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions	657,832	−8,637	649,195
Health and Safety Executive	172,375	−2,477	169,898
Office of Passenger Franchising	12,809	−232	12,577
Office of the Rail Regulator	9,277	−377	8,900
Charity Commission	20,449	−470	19,979
Home Office	2,220,050	−83,658	2,136,392
Crown Prosecution Service	228,474	−849	227,625
Serious Fraud Office	11,834	−610	11,224
Lord Chancellor's Department	516,109	−19,292	496,817
Public Record Office	26,842	0	26,842
Northern Ireland Court Service	30,566	−606	29,960
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	551,941	−19,973	531,968
Department for International Development	66,016	−176	65,840
Office of Electricity Regulation	18,100	0	18,100
Office of Gas Supply	12,938	0	12,938
Office of Telecommunications	11,903	−242	11,661
Office of Fair Trading	24,288	−104	24,184
Department of Trade and Industry	391,634	−18,028	373,606
The Intervention Board	69,757	−3,663	66,094
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	366,275	−5,845	360,430
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	33,506	−534	32,972
Department of Social Security[1]	2,893,475	−24,740	2,868,735
financed by the Windfall Tax	*6,952*	*0*	*6,952*
Office Secretary of State for Scotland and Advocate General	2,400	0	2,400
Office of Secretary of State for Wales	2,030	0	2,030
Northern Ireland Office	194,548	−1,025	193,523
Office for National Statistics	115,788	−13,580	102,208
Customs and Excise	798,207	−6,092	792,115
Friendly Societies Registry	2,430	−30	2,400
Inland Revenue	2,234,396	−93,907	2,140,489
National Savings Department	179,041	−4,505	174,536
National Investment and Loans Office	1,562	−130	1,432
HM Treasury	59,203	−2,238	56,965
Security and Intelligence Services	410,613	−30,546	380,067
Cabinet Office	144,736	−34,840	109,896
Privy Council Office	2,544	−42	2,502
Total for gross running costs areas	14,090,348	−436,030	13,654,318
Northern Ireland departments[1,2]	626,287	−37,886	588,401
financed by the Windfall Tax	*9,622*	*0*	*9,622*

[1] Includes all departmental running costs expenditure other than that financed by the Windfall Tax.

[2] The Department of Finance and Personnel control the running costs of the Northern Ireland Departments. The figures shown here are the plans which will apply until the Northern Ireland Assembly assumes responsibility for public expenditure.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance Computer

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the backlog of claims arising from the failure of the national insurance computer system to be cleared and arrears payments and compensation payments to be made; and if he will make a statement. [80290]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 14 April 1999]:* In my written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) on 15 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *486–88*, I updated the House about progress that the Benefits and Contributions Agencies had made in addressing outstanding issues relating to the introduction of the new National Insurance Recording System (NIRS2).

From 1 April, when the Contributions Agency transferred to the Inland Revenue, joint arrangements have been in place to manage the NIRS2 programme. The Stabilisation and Recovery plans for 1999–2000, which include plans for reviewing the backlogs in the Benefits Agency, are currently being finalised.

Good progress has been made over the last month and I am pleased to announce that arrangements are in hand to pay compensation at a flat rate of £10 to claimants who have suffered an unreasonable delay as announced on 1 February 1999.

Payments to Pensioners and Widows will be issued automatically at the end of April. Claimants who are in receipt of Incapacity Benefit and those Widows and Pensioners whose claims are handled clerically will be paid their £10 when their case is reviewed and compensation under the normal rules will also be considered. Claimants will not need to make a claim for this payment.

I am also pleased to announce that the Benefits Agency will begin to review the backlog of initial and emergency awards of benefit this week. Where a claimant has been underpaid, any arrears of benefit due will be paid and, if entitlement to compensation under the Department Special Payments scheme exceeds the £10 already paid, cases will be identified. These payments of compensation will be handled centrally. Additional staff have been allocated to this task and the standard process has been streamlined to ensure payments of compensation are issued as quickly as possible following the review of benefit.

It is planned that he Benefits Agency's review of cases will be completed in six months.

It is expected that from the end of April information from NIRS2 will be used to process Retirement Pension forecast applications. This is the final benefit process to migrate from the NIRS1 to the NIRS2 system.

Winter Allowance

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reason the £100 winter allowance will not be paid through the basic state pension; and what is the additional cost of paying it separately. [80853]

Angela Eagle: We are committed to alleviating fuel poverty amongst the elderly of this country, and to enabling all pensioners to share in its increasing prosperity. To help meet these objectives we have increased the Winter Fuel Payment fivefold for eligible pensioner households. It is also why, for this coming winter, we will make all payments before Christmas.

Paying the Winter Fuel Payment through the same vehicle as Retirement Pension would not be straightforward. This is because they are designed to serve different purposes. The Winter Fuel Payment is intended to help each eligible household with the cost of its fuel bills. In order to do so, it takes into account household composition to provide an overall payment of £100 to each eligible household, rather than each individual pensioner within it. Retirement Pension is designed to provide each individual pensioner with regular income. In order to do this, payments are based only on individual entitlements, regardless of household circumstances.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Ms Jenny Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were receiving severe disablement allowance in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the West Midlands on 31 March. [81163]

Mr. Bayley: Information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table. Figures for 31 March 1999 are not yet available.

Severe disablement allowance recipients

	31 August 1998
United Kingdom	385,412
Northern Ireland	15,612
Great Britain	369,800
West Midlands	31,840

Note:
Both systems exclude a small number of cases [illegible] clerically.
Sources:
Northern Ireland: 100 per cent. sample of the Benefit computer system.
Great Britain and West Midlands: 5 per cent. sample of the benefit computer system.

Pensioners

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners with no private income there were in each local authority area in Wales in each of the past 10 years. [81340]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available at local authority district level.

Annuity Rates

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to require annuity rates to be equalised between men and women. [81370]

Mr. Timms: There is already a requirement to purchase a unisex annuity in respect of any protected rights in occupational and personal pensions.

To extend this further could have effects on the annuity market and those possible effects would have to be examined carefully before making any changes to the existing requirement.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

CAP

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the calculations he made following the recent agreement by European Union Agriculture Ministers on CAP reform to determine the saving on consumers' food bills which will result when its latest reforms are fully implemented. [79776]

Mr. Rooker: As a result of the agreement reached by heads of government in Berlin, our calculations suggest that the benefits to UK consumers from the implementation of the cuts in support prices could be £1 billion a year once the reform has been fully implemented, and provided that all the likely reduction in farm-gate prices are passed through to retail level. A note explaining the basis for the calculation has been placed in the Library.

River Derwent (Flooding)

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will commission a public inquiry into events surrounding the recent flooding of the River Derwent in North and East Yorkshire. [80270]

Mr. Morley: In the light of a report I have received from the Environment Agency on the events surrounding the flooding, I am not persuaded that a public inquiry into this event is justified. I shall write to the hon. Member about the Agency's report.

Arable Area Payments Scheme

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the payment per hectare in sterling under the arable area payments scheme for *(a)* cereals, *(b)* set-aside, *(c)* pulses, *(d)* oilseed rape and *(e)* linseed for each year from 1999–2000 to 2005–06, using current exchange rates. [81372]

Mr. Rooker: Using the rate of exchange with the euro which applied on 15 April 1999 (£0.6667/euro), payment rates under the Arable Area Payments Scheme in England are as follows:

£/ha

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03 onwards*
Cereals	213.38	230.39	247.39	247.39
Set-aside	270.28	230.39	247.39	247.39
Pulses	308.22	284.70	284.70	284.70
Oilseed rape	377.18	327.30	289.78	247.39
Linseed	412.71	346.58	296.98	247.39

The payment rates for oilseed rape and linseed in 2000–01 and 2001–02 are subject to confirmation in the legal texts implementing the recent CAP reform agreement. Payments on oilseeds in 1999–2000 will be subject to adjustment in line with the observed EU reference price. Payments on oilseeds from 1999–2000 to 2001–02 inclusive will also be subject to any penalties applied when the EU Maximum Guaranteed Area is exceeded.

These figures exclude any compensation which may be available under EU regulations in respect of currency fluctuations.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has discussed with representatives of the biotechnology industry the introduction of a voluntary three-year halt in the planting of herbicide tolerant genetically modified crops. [77683]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 19 March 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 19 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *879–80*.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which of his responsibilities in respect of genetically modified organisms will be devolved to *(a)* the Scottish Parliament and *(b)* the National Assembly for Wales. [81460]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 20 April 1999]:* Food and environmental safety will be devolved policy areas. However, all activities involving genetically modified organisms are governed by European legislation, and, in order to promote a coherent UK framework for handling these matters, administrative concordats are being developed between the relevant Whitehall Departments and the devolved executives.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Senator Pinochet

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Attorney-General for what reason a representative of the Crown Prosecution Service was in Madrid prior to the issue of a final warrant for the arrest of Senator Pinochet; if he will list that official's meetings in Madrid; and if he will make a statement. [81225]

The Solicitor-General: Warrants for the arrest of Senator Pinochet have been issued by the Bow Street Magistrates' Court on 16 October 1998 (the first arrest warrant), 22 October 1998 (the second arrest warrant) and on 15 April 1999 (the third arrest warrant).

A lawyer from the Crown Prosecution Service, accompanied by counsel instructed by the CPS on behalf of the Kingdom of Spain, has visited Madrid in connection with the proceedings against Senator Pinochet on three occasions. The first occasion was on 22 and 23 October 1998. The second occasion was on 22 and 23 December 1998. And the third occasion was on 6 and 7 April 1999.

Before, during and after visiting Madrid there has been telephone contact between the CPS and counsel and Judge Baltasar Garzon Real.

During visits to Madrid the CPS lawyer and counsel have attended meetings with Judge Baltasar Garzon Real and also meetings chaired by Judge Baltasar Garzon Real at which representatives of the Spanish interested parties have been present. These have included Dr. Juan

Garces, Enrique de Santiago, Carlos Slepoy and Virginia Dias. Additionally, secretaries, assistants and interpreters have been present at meetings.

During the first visit the CPS lawyer and counsel met the acting British Ambassador prior to meeting the Spanish authorities.

The CPS lawyer and counsel have attended in Madrid to receive instructions from Judge Baltasar Garzon Real, to inspect documentation and to advise on the extradition proceedings.

Throughout the extradition proceedings the Crown Prosecution Service has been acting as agent for the Kingdom of Spain in its capacity as a private lawyer acting for a foreign client and not that of prosecutor, as has been recognised by the Divisional Court. It would not therefore be appropriate to detail the contents of the meetings held in Madrid. The matters raised touch on client-solicitor confidentiality and are for resolving through the judicial process.

PRIME MINISTER

Proportional Representation

Q15. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on proportional representation for Westminster parliamentary elections. [80336]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, column *238*.

KLA

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he has made of *(a)* the Europol report to European interior and justice Ministers on a connection between the KLA and Albanian drugs gangs and *(b)* the German Federal Police Agency report on KLA involvement in heroin trafficking for the acquisition of arms. [81418]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 19 April 1999]*: There has been no such report from Europol to European Justice and Home Affairs Ministers. I understand also that the German Federal Police Agency have stated that they have not prepared any such report.

Gibraltar

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the outcome of his summit discussions with the Spanish Prime Minister in relation to Gibraltar during the weekend of 10 and 11 April. [81577]

The Prime Minister: The Summit provided an opportunity to mark and formalise the step-change in our wider relationship with Spain, an EU partner with whom we have many common interests. I did discuss Gibraltar with Sr. Aznar. I set out, as I have before, British policy on Gibraltar. I also expressed our wish to see improved relations between Britain and Spain lead to material improvements in relation to Gibraltar.

Ministerial Committees (European Policy)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the membership and terms of reference of all ministerial committees dealing with European policy. [81432]

The Prime Minister: The principal Committee for considering questions relating to the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union is the Ministerial Sub-Committee on European Issues E(DOP). The Committee is chaired by the Foreign Secretary and reports to the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy, which I chair. The composition and terms of reference of E(DOP) were last amended on 19 February 1999 and are as shown. The composition and terms of reference of DOP have not changed since I published an updated list of Cabinet Ministerial Committees on 21 October 1998, *Official Report*, columns *1123–35*. European Union matters will be considered by other Committees from time to time.

Ministerial Sub-Committee on European Issues ((E)DOP)

Composition

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Chair)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Defence

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury and Chief Whip

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for International Development

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Lord Privy Seal, Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women

Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Attorney-General

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe

Other Ministers will be invited to attend, as the nature of the business requires.

The United Kingdom's Permanent Representative to the European Union is also in attendance.

Terms of Reference are:

"To consider questions relating to the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy".

Environmental Advisory Committees

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he is taking to achieve greater co-ordination between the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment and the Advisory Committee on Pesticides. [81450]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 April 1999]*: The Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment and the Advisory Committee on Pesticides already co-ordinate through their Secretariats and exchange information on matters of mutual interest such as the use

of pesticides on genetically modified plants. The future co-ordination of these and other committees is subject to the outcome of the 'review of the framework for overseeing developments in biotechnology' announced by my right hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 17 December 1998, *Official Report,* columns *644–45.*

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 21 April. [81275]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be leaving for Washington. I have also sent a message on behalf of Britain to the United States of America, expressing our shock and sympathy for the appalling tragedy of the murdered schoolchildren in Littleton, Colorado. I know the whole House will share those sentiments.

WALES

Playgroups

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to assist playgroups in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [78957]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: On 1 April 1999, I announced funding of £50,000, to be split between the Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association and Mudiad Ysgolian Meithrin, to help sustain good quality playgroups in Wales. This is in addition to the £50,000 made available in 1998–99 to support playgroups at risk of closing.

I have also announced that there will be a review of how playgroups and the pre-school movement can develop their role in delivering both early years education and childcare in Wales.

In future, childcare will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80533]

Mr. Michael: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him on 14 April 1999, *Official Report,* columns *239–40,* by the Minister for the Cabinet Office. In addition, I welcome the findings of the Macpherson report. Its existence, and in particular its definition of institutional racism, is an important backdrop to the work my Department is undertaking on building race equality into its policies and procedures—work which will be taken forward with statutory backing in the National Assembly for Wales.

Shotton

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet Shotton town council to discuss the impact of out-of-town retail outlets upon the town's retail outlets; and if he will make a statement. [80844]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is unable to meet Shotton town council on this matter. New planning policy guidance for Wales was issued on 7 April this year including further encouragement for locating new retailing in town centres and clarifying policy in respect of testing the need for new shopping proposals.

In the future, guidance on retailing will be a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Nurses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many extra nurses he has recruited; and if he will make a statement. [80842]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information on individual Trust recruitment is not held centrally.

Annual intakes of nursing students in Wales have increased from 656 in 1994 to 992 in 1998. In February 1999, there were 2,282 nursing students in Wales being trained to meet NHS Trusts' demands for newly qualified staff. As a result of a survey of individual Trusts' needs, advertisements will be placed in local newspapers to attract registered nurses back to the NHS in Wales and we shall be asking Trusts to provide information on the outcome of this campaign in due course.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Royal Commission on Long-term Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what response he proposes to make to the Royal Commission's report on Long Term Care. [80839]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I refer to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health's statement to the House on 1 March 1999, *Official Report,* columns *741–52.* The Government welcome the Report and wish to see a full public debate on the recommendation that the Royal Commission has made. The Commission's recommendations are wide-ranging, covering matters which will need to be decided at a UK level and others which will be the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Retail Outlets

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set up a working party to examine the impact of out-of-town retail outlets upon town shopping areas; and if he will make a statement. [80843]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to set-up a working party on retail matters. New planning policy guidance for Wales was issued on 7 April this year including further encouragement for locating new retailing in town centres and clarifying policy in respect of testing the need for new shopping developments.

In the future, planning guidance on retail development will be a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Green Belt

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* Green Belt and *(b)* green barrier areas there are in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [80845]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: There are currently no Green Belts in Wales and information on the extent of green barriers in Wales is not collected centrally.

Planning policy guidance on Green Belts in Wales is set out in the first revision of "Planning Guidance (Wales): Planning Policy" which was published on 7 April.

In future, planning guidance on Green Belts in Wales will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Beef on the Bone Ban

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the National Assembly for Wales will have the power to *(a)* modify and *(b)* lift the ban on beef sold on the bone; and if he will make a statement. [81622]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Yes. The power under which the Beef Bones Regulations 1997 were made will be transferred to the National Assembly for Wales.

CABINET OFFICE

Public Consultation Exercises

15. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what monitoring has taken place of the conduct of public consultation exercises by Government Departments. [80306]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Cabinet Office are monitoring written consultation exercises so as to evaluate how far the guidance has been adopted and what impact it has made on the quality of consultation.

Anti-drugs Policy

18. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he will announce his criteria for measuring changes in illegal drug (i) use, (ii) addiction and (iii) deaths. [80310]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: Details of how we will measure progress towards all objectives linked to the four key aims of the strategy will be included in the co-ordinator's report and plan, due to be published shortly.

Absenteeism

19. **Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what discussions he has had with trade unions representing public sector organisations to reduce absenteeism rates at work. [80311]

Mr. Kilfoyle: In developing guidance on managing attendance in the public sector, my officials have worked closely with the TUC, Unison and the Council of Civil Service Unions. This issue was also touched upon in one of my regular meetings with the Council.

Departmental Buildings (Marsham Street)

20. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he will demolish the old Department of the Environment buildings at Marsham Street. [80312]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government are committed to the demolition of the building at 2 Marsham Street. However, we are not yet in a position to proceed with immediate demolition. Temporary re-use, or demolition and re-building, are being considered by the Home Office as part of their PFI accommodation project. Their decision on which option to follow is expected later this year.

Civil Service (Ethnic Minorities)

21. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on his plans to increase the representation of ethnic minorities in the senior civil service. [80314]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Civil Service has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity and wants to reflect the full diversity of society at all levels.

Addressing the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the Senior Civil Service is a priority. The Modernising Government White Paper set out targets for ethnic minority representation in the Senior Civil Service. By 2004–05, our aim is that 3.2 per cent. of the Senior Civil Service will be from ethnic minority backgrounds—this is double the current position.

Biotechnology

22. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to his oral answer of 10 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 307, on the biotechnology and genetic modification ministerial group, if he will place in the Library his assessment of the prospective benefits to humankind of biotechnology. [80315]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: As Minister for the Cabinet Office I have commissioned no such assessments. However, I can inform the House that the prospective benefits of biotechnology have been well documented in a number of reports from the S&T Select Committees of this House and the S&T and European Communities' Select Committees of the Other Place.

Common Agricultural Policy (Duchy of Lancaster)

23. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the ways in which CAP reform will have an impact upon the returns from the estates currently run by the Duchy of Lancaster. [80316]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Duchy of Lancaster lets all productive agricultural land on its estates to tenant farmers. The returns to the Duchy from let farms are in the form of farm rents. These rents are related to the earning capacity and profitability of farm holdings.

Should reform of the Common Agricultural Policy bring a change in the economics of tenanted farms, the Duchy would expect this to affect the earning capacities of the holdings, being the basis on which rents are calculated.

Policy Presentation

24. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what further steps are being taken to co-ordinate the presentation of Government policies through advertising in the media. [80319]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Advertising is used to support the particular communication needs of individual policies or programmes. Under Cabinet Office Guidance, Departments must ensure that advertising is the most economical, efficient and effective way to meet the need, and that any campaign is no bigger than necessary.

"Modernising Government"

25. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent representations he has received on the White Paper "Modernising Government". [80320]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made to the House on 30 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 859–61, commending Modernising Government. Members of the public as well as those who work in the public service have been invited to feed in their views on the White Paper, in writing or direct to the Modernising Government e-mail address: at Moderngov@gtnet.gov.uk. To-date some 50 responses have been received.

Ombudsman (Maladministration)

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what remedy is available to an individual who believes he has suffered from maladministration on the part of an ombudsman. [80302]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: If a complainant is dissatisfied with the way in which the investigation of their complaint has been handled by the Parliamentary Ombudsman, they can ask their MP to take up the matter with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Public Administration.

Government Departments (Telephone Advice)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he is taking to improve the quality of advice given to the public by telephone from Government Departments. [80303]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Modernising Government White Paper set out revised service standards for central Government Departments and agencies. These included, for the first time, a commitment to answer telephone calls quickly and helpfully.

Professional Statisticians

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many staff by grade are employed as professional statisticians in his Department; how many of these staff have been accepted as fast stream by the Civil Service Selection Board; and how many have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society. [81207]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Statistical work is undertaken by a range of specialists such as Research Officers, Social Survey Officers and Economists. Within the Cabinet Office, there are two Band A staff employed as professional statisticians, both of whom were recruited through the Civil Service Selection Board. Neither hold the status of Chartered Statistician.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many staff who have worked as professional statisticians in the Cabinet Office have left on early retirement in each of the past 10 years. [81187]

Mr. Kilfoyle: No professional statisticians on the permanent strength of the Cabinet Office have left on early retirement in any of the past 10 years.

Charter Mark

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to extend the charter mark award scheme. [80321]

Mr. Kilfoyle: We expect to receive 1,500 applications in 1999; a 25 per cent. increase over the record 1998 figure of 1,200. We have also launched a self-assessment pack, to encourage more and better applications, and as a useful quality tool in its own right.

In 2000 we are expanding the Scheme to include all voluntary organisations which provide a public service and which are 50 per cent. or more financed from public funds; and to include sub-contractors to the public sector which are providing services also provided by the public sector.

Government Intranet

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to establish links between the Government Intranet and the European Parliament equivalent. [80318]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Central Information Technology Unit (CITU) and the European Secretariat in the Cabinet Office are currently piloting an electronic link to the European Council Secretariat. CITU, together with the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) and the European Commission are investigating the technical options for connecting the Government Secure Intranet and networks of the IDA project (Interchange of Data between Administrations).

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Unmarried Fathers

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department when he plans to implement the commitment that unmarried fathers will have the same responsibilities as married fathers under the Children Act 1989. [80725]

Mr. Hoon: With one in three children born outside marriage, the Government want to encourage unmarried fathers to recognise their responsibilities towards their children. The Children Act 1989 already enables unmarried fathers to acquire parental responsibility either by making a parental responsibility agreement with the child's mother or by applying to the court for a parental responsibility order. When an appropriate legislative opportunity arises, the Government intend to introduce a

provision that unmarried fathers who sign the birth certificate jointly with the mother will acquire parental responsibility without further formality.

Legal Aid Board (Staff Absence)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how much absence through illness was recorded at the Legal Aid Board during the year 1998–99 in relation to grades 7 and above; and what the figures were for 1995–96. [81249]

Mr. Hoon: The Board has this month begun to collect information on sick absence centrally. This information is not readily available in the form requested for any earlier period, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Judiciary (Complaints)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he takes on receipt of a complaint against a member of the judiciary; and if he will make a statement. [81222]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor takes complaints about members of the judiciary very seriously. In order to maintain the independence of the judiciary, judges are not accountable to the Lord Chancellor for their judicial decisions. The appropriate recourse against judicial decisions lies in the appeal or review process in the courts. However, when complaints are made about the personal conduct of a judge, the Lord Chancellor instructs officials to make inquiries on his behalf. These inquiries generally include drawing the matter to the attention of the judge concerned and giving him or her an opportunity to comment. Where necessary, the Lord Chancellor will also call for transcripts or other additional information. The judge's comments are considered by the Lord Chancellor and, if appropriate, are used by him to inform a reply to the complainant, and a copy is sent to the judge. Each complaint is dealt with individually.

The Lord Chancellor's statutory powers are limited to the dismissal of judicial office holders, below the level of the High Court Bench, on the grounds of misbehaviour and incapacity and these are accordingly exercisable only in extreme cases. But the Lord Chancellor, as Head of the Judiciary, is able to guide, counsel, advise, or rebuke with a view to ensuring that judges uphold the standard of conduct which the public expect of them.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints he has received about the behaviour of members of the judiciary in each of the last three years; how many have been upheld; and if he will make a statement. [81246]

Mr. Hoon: The principle of judicial independence, which is central to our constitutional arrangements, means that it is not open to the Lord Chancellor or his Department to consider complaints about judicial decisions made by judges within their own independent sphere. The Lord Chancellor does, however, consider complaints about the personal conduct of members of the judiciary. In the period between August 1998 (when new internal arrangements for handling such complaints came into force) and March 1999, the Lord Chancellor received a total of 2,109 complaints about members of the judiciary, the majority of which related to judicial decisions. Of the remainder, 183 were taken forward for investigation as they related to personal conduct. To date, 26 of these cases are outstanding. Out of the 157 completed cases, there were five occasions when the Lord chancellor saw fit to take further action, either by writing to the judge or by arranging for him or her to be seen by officials. Comparable figures for the period before August 1998 are unavailable.

Professional Statisticians

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff by grade are employed as professional statisticians in his Department; how many of these staff have been accepted as fast stream by the Civil Service Selection Board; and how many have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society. [81204]

Mr. Hoon: Currently, there are seven professional statisticians within the Department, who have been accepted as fast streamers. None has been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society.

The following table provides a breakdown, by grade.

Grade	*Number*
Grade 6 statistician	1
Grade 7 statistician	3
Assistant statistician	3
Total	7

The figures include professional statisticians who may be currently working in administrative posts.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff who have worked as professional statisticians in his Department have left on early retirement in each of the past 10 years. [81184]

Mr. Hoon: No professional statisticians have left on early retirement in the past 10 years.

Legal Aid (Cape plc)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department which members of his Department had discussions with GJW on *(a)* how many occasions and *(b)* what dates concerning the wish by Cape plc to amend the Access to Justice Bill [*Lords*] to ban foreign employees of British companies obtaining legal aid; how many officials were involved; what undertakings were given; what plans he has to introduce amendments to the Bill that will meet the wishes of Cape plc; and when he informed other Ministers of Cape plc's representations. [81151]

Mr. Hoon: No members of my Department have had discussions with GJW concerning the wish of Cape plc to amend the Access to Justice Bill [*Lords*] to ban foreign employees of British companies from obtaining legal aid.

The Government have no plans to exclude from legal aid people pursuing actions in England and Wales solely because they live outside this country. The Access to Justice Bill will, however, enable the Government to target available public money on priority needs. Because most sound claims for personal injury can be funded privately, using conditional fee agreements, generally legal aid will not, in future, be available to fund them.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 22 April 1999

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Bank Charges

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he plans to meet representatives of the banking community to discuss their charging practices. [81646]

Dr. Howells: This policy area is the responsibility of Her Majesty's Treasury. I have no plans to meet representatives at this time.

Shipbuilding Intervention Fund

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the availability of Shipbuilding Intervention Fund grants for 1999. [82166]

Mr. Battle: I have decided to extend the Shipbuilding Intervention Fund for currently eligible yards until 31 December 1999. The rates of support will be unchanged from those in 1998, namely 9 per cent. for large ships and 4½ per cent. for small ships, both rates inclusive of Shipbuilders' Relief of 2 per cent. These are the maximum rates permitted within the EU's Shipbuilding Regulation.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Lough Foyle

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the policy of Her Majesty's Government is on the pay of the crew of the research vessel Lough Foyle. [81213]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland contracts out the management and crewing of the research vessel "Lough Foyle" via periodic competitive tender.

The tenderers, not the Department, determine the pay of the crew, within an overall tender package.

Firearms

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many legally registered firearms have been *(a)* reported stolen, *(b)* found to be missing and *(c)* otherwise separated from (i) private and (ii) public owners in each of the last 10 years; and what percentage that represents of the total number of legally held weapons. [81131]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 April 1999]:* Records are not maintained by the RUC in a manner that would provide a breakdown of firearms stolen or found to be missing into the categories requested. However I am advised by the Chief Constable that the total numbers of legally registered firearms reported stolen or found to be missing from private and public owners in Northern Ireland in each of the last 10 years are follows:

Period	*Private*	*Public*	*Total*
16 April 1989–15 April 1990	78	5	83
16 April 1990–15 April 1991	79	10	89
16 April 1991–15 April 1992	76	1	77
16 April 1992–15 April 1993	87	4	91
16 April 1993–15 April 1994	84	1	85
16 April 1994–15 April 1995	84	2	86
16 April 1995–15 April 1996	80	2	82
16 April 1996–15 April 1997	97	3	100
16 April 1997–15 April 1998	143	2	145
16 April 1998–15 April 1999	125	4	129
Total	933	34	967

In the present context "public owners" is taken to mean those public sector employees who require a firearm for their official duties and hold same on foot of a firearms certificate issued to them by the Chief Constable.The methods used by the RUC to keep firearms statistics in general, or those reported stolen or found to be missing do not permit a percentage calculation for the years requested.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the names of approved firearms clubs giving *(a)* the estimated membership of each, *(b)* the parliamentary constituency in which its premises are located and *(c)* the (i) number and (ii) types of weapons reported (1) stolen and (2) lost from each club in the last five years. [81132]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 April 1999]:* The following is a list of firearms clubs authorised by the Secretary of State under Article 54 of the Firearms (NI) Order 1981 together with the estimated membership of each and the Parliamentary Constituencies in which the clubs' authorised premises are located. I am advised by the Chief Constable that information regarding the number and types of firearms reported stolen or lost from each club in the last five years is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Firearm Clubs

Name of club	*Estimated number of members*	*Parliamentary constituency*
RUC Rifle and Pistol Club	159	Belfast, East
Gallaher Small Bore Rifle Club	11	Belfast, East
CIYMS Rifle Club	20	Belfast, East
Campbell College CCF Rifle Club	10	Belfast, East
Belfast Harbour Police Rifle Club	10	Belfast, North

Firearm Clubs

Name of club	*Estimated number of members*	*Parliamentary constituency*
2390 Squadron Air Training Corps-Belfast Royal Academy Rifle Club	10	Belfast, North
Ulster Rifle Association	394	Belfast, South
Ardnavalley Scout Activity Centre	10	Belfast, South
Roe Valley Rifle Club	19	East Londonderry
Laghey Small Bore Pistol and Rifle Club	53	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Dungannon Rifle and Pistol Club	134	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Dungannon Royal School Rifle Club	17	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Sherrygroom Rifle and Pistol Club	35	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Omagh District USCA Rifle Club	141	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Tully Sports Club	16	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
City of Derry Rifle and Pistol Club	16	Foyle
Creevedonnell Air Rifle Club	34	Foyle
Coolkeeragh Air Rifle Club	10	Foyle
Co Londonderry XB Rifle and Pistol Club	73	Foyle
BT (NI) Small Bore Pistol and Rifle Club	101	Lagan Valley
Downshire Rifle Club	55	Lagan Valley
Marlin Rifle Club	17	Lagan Valley
Downpatrick USCA Rifle Club	41	Lagan Valley
Orritor Rifle Club	19	Mid-Ulster
Desertmartin Air Rifle Club	47	Mid-Ulster
Mowillian Air Rifle Club	19	Mid-Ulster
Castledawson Rifle and Pistol Club	24	Mid-Ulster
Culnady Air Rifle Club	17	Mid-Ulster
Armagh Royal School Rifle Club	64	Newry and Armagh
Leopold Street Rifle Club	17	North Antrim
Ballymena Rifle and Pistol Club	65	North Antrim
Michelin Athletic Small Bore Section RC	24	North Antrim
North Antrim Small Bore Rifle Club	20	North Antrim
Tully Shooting Club	72	North Antrim
Clandeboye, Bangor and District Rifle and Pistol C	248	North Down
Bangor and District Small Bore Rifle Club	24	North Down
Carrowdore and District Shooting and Recreational Club	29	North Down
Rockport School Shooting Club	30	North Down
Bangor Grammar School Combined Cadet Force Air Rifle Club	10	North Down
East Antrim Rifle Club	177	South Antrim
Fortwilliam Rifle Club	14	South Antrim
Jordanstown Scout Group Air Rifle Club	19	South Antrim
RAF Aldergrove Full Bore Shooting Club	30	South Antrim
Belfast Home Guard	15	Strangford
Shorts RC	17	Strangford
IEL Rifle Club	13	Strangford
Comber Rifle Club	128	Strangford
Loughbrickland Small Bore Rifle Club	124	Upper Bann
Portadown Ulster Home Guard	10	Upper Bann
Mill Valley Shooting Club	34	Upper Bann
Omagh Scout Group Rifle Club	18	West Tyrone
Bready Air Rifle Club	38	West Tyrone
Donemanagh Air Rifle Club	12	West Tyrone

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many legally held firearms there are in Northern Ireland *(a)* in total and *(b)* of each type. [81133]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 April 1999]:* The Chief Constable has advised me that at 31 December 1998 there were 139,588 legally held firearms in Northern Ireland. The breakdown of these is as follows:

Type of firearm	*Number*
Shotguns	90,548
Airguns	22,109
Rifles	14,254
Handguns	12,090
Miscellaneous	[1]587

[1] Mainly firearms used for the humane killing of animals

In relation to the reply give to my hon. Friend on 16 April 1999, *Official Report,* columns *359–60,* I would advise that the figure quoted for miscellaneous firearms was incorrect. The correct figure is quoted on this occasion.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Discontinued Prosecutions

32. **Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Attorney-General on how many occasions the Crown Prosecution Service has discontinued criminal prosecutions since May 1997 on the grounds of disproportionate cost. [80380]

The Solicitor-General: Each case which the police send to the Crown Prosecution Service is reviewed by a

Crown Prosecutor. The case will be carefully considered to make sure that it meets the tests set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors, which is issued under section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985. The Code states that where there is enough evidence to offer a realistic prospect of conviction, in cases of seriousness, a prosecution will be the usual course of action unless there are public interest factors tending against prosecution which clearly outweight those tending in favour.

Cost, on its own, is not a factor that determines whether or not a prosecution should be discontinued. However, if during the course of a prosecution it becomes clear that a court is likely to impose only a very small or nominal penalty, a prosecution may no longer be in the public interest and the proceedings may be discontinued.

The Crown Prosecution Service does not maintain any central record of discontinued cases. The information is recorded on individual case files, the recovery of which would involve disproportionate cost.

Case Presentation

33. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Attorney-General what steps he plans to take to improve the way in which cases are presented to the CPS and Serious Fraud Office for prosecution. [80381]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office is responsible both for the investigation and prosecution of cases involving serious or complex fraud. In almost every case it investigates in conjunction with a police force and there is a Memorandum of Understanding between the Director of the Serious Fraud Office and ACPO on how investigations are to be conducted. The Memorandum places an emphasis on planning and accountability and in every case SFO documentary control systems are used to ensure the efficient use of investigator and police time. The Crown Prosecution Service is working with the police on a number of initiatives to improve the way that cases are presented to the Crown Prosecution Service including collaboration on ways of implementing the Glidewell recommendations to introduce joint police/CPS Criminal Justice Units to facilitate the progress of cases through the magistrates' courts and the establishment of Trial Units to handle Crown Court casework.

Crown Prosecution Service

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Attorney-General what recent representations he has received on his proposals to reform the Crown Prosecution Service. [80375]

The Solicitor-General: There is continuing interest in the reform of the Crown Prosecution Service. The Attorney-General and I regularly receive inquiries and representations from hon. Members about the Service.

Sir Iain Glidewell's Report on the Crown Prosecution Service made a number of recommendations aimed at reform of the Crown Prosecution Service. Additionally, the Government decided to re-structure the CPS into 42 geographical Areas to improve efficiency and accountability.

The Crown Prosecution Service is making good progress in considering and implementing the recommendations in Sir Iain Glidewell's Report. Additionally, the new 42 Chief Crown Prosecutors are now in post to take forward the reforms that will improve efficiency.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he takes to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service gives due weight to environmental considerations in deciding whether to pursue a prosecution. [80379]

The Solicitor-General: A number of prosecuting authorities are responsible for the enforcement of cases involving environmental considerations. Agencies such as the Environment Agency prosecute a high proportion of such cases; the Crown Prosecution Service prosecutes offences investigated by the police. All prosecuting authorities must apply the Code for Crown Prosecutors when making the decision to prosecute. If there is sufficient evidence, environmental considerations will be a factor taken into account when deciding whether a prosecution is required in the public interest.

Homicides (London)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases of homicide in London *(a)* have not been the subject of commencement of legal proceedings, *(b)* have been the subject of commenced but discontinued legal proceedings, *(c)* have been the subject of completed legal proceedings, but without conviction and *(d)* have led to conviction, for each year since the CPS was established. [80372]

The Solicitor-General: The CPS do not keep central records. Figures compiled by the Home Office from police notifications show that:

Year offence recorded	*Number of offences*	*(a) Not commenced per cent.*	*(b) Commenced but discontinued per cent.*	*(c) Completed but no conviction for homicide per cent.*	*(d) Conviction per cent.*
1986	210	13	1	24	61
1987	193	14	1	21	64
1988	148	17	1	20	63
1989	177	16	—	23	61
1990	184	19	—	25	55
1991	184	16	1	27	56
1992	175	12	1	29	59
1993	160	16	—	23	62
1994	167	20	1	21	58
1995	167	24	2	19	54
1996	144	19	1	19	56
1997	180	29	1	12	42

In addition, there were proceedings pending as follows: 1 in 1986, 1 in 1994, 1 in 1995, 7 in 1996 and 29 in 1997.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Commission Funding

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) of 18 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *759–60*, concerning EU budget line B3–306, for what reason the Commission removed the prohibition in the amended Budget Line notes; and what is the basis for the statement that the Commission shares his Department's view of how such expenditure should be used. [80177]

Ms Quin: The drafting of language used in this Budget Line is a matter for the European Commission.

I refer the hon. Member to the Budget Line notes for 1999. They state:

> "These measures are designed to be an effective channel of communication and dialogue between the people of the European Union and the Community institutions. They take account of specific national and regional characteristics, in close co-operation with the Member State authorities."

Le Monde Article

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department was informed in advance of the intended placement of the article by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) in *Le Monde* on 3 March. [80156]

Mr. Robin Cook: No.

EU Common Foreign and Security Policy

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to deposit the agendas for the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy Working Groups in the Library. [80149]

Ms Quin: The Government do not have discretion unilaterally to disclose documents which may jeopardise the confidentiality of internal European Union discussion, such as the agendas of CFSP working groups, which, on occasions, can be sensitive. However, the Government are committed to ensuring more effective parliamentary scrutiny of, and greater openness in EU business, including the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and have introduced procedures for the parliamentary scrutiny of all CFSP Common Positions, Joint Actions, and other politically important documents.

The UK participates in a very large number of working-level meetings in the international organisations of which it is a member: not only in the EU but also, for example, in the UN, NATO and the OSCE.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings have been held between *(a)* United Kingdom Ministers, *(b)* British diplomats and *(c)* other parties acting on behalf of the United Kingdom with President Slobodan Milosevic since he assumed the presidency of Yugoslavia; on which date the meetings were held; and what matters were discussed in each case. [81578]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I met President Milosevic on 31 October 1997 when I informed him that we wanted the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to rejoin the European family of nations but that this would require progress on democratisation, indicted war criminals and Kosovo. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary travelled to Belgrade to discuss Kosovo with President Milosevic on 5 March 1998.

Our Ambassador in Belgrade, Ivor Roberts, was present during the first of the above calls and met Milosevic separately on 10 June 1997 when the conversation was dominated by war criminals and Kosovo. Brian Donnelly, our subsequent Ambassador, presented his credentials to Milosevic on 19 December 1997: the call focused on Bosnia, war criminals and Kosovo.

Ivor Roberts travelled to Belgrade on 2 July 1998 as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's Special Representative to discuss Kosovo. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Party met Milosevic on 29 September and handed over a letter from the Prime Minister.

Former Yugoslavia

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the dates when the Government of the United Kingdom recognised the independence of new states which were parts of the former state of Yugoslavia, *(b)* what conditions were imposed on their recognition, *(c)* whether the conditions were imposed in concert with the then other members of the European Community and *(d)* the dates of such decisions taken by the Council of Ministers. [81434]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Republics of Croatia and Slovenia were both recognised by the UK, as part of a concerted European Community move, on 15 January 1992.

The Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was recognised by all European Community states on 7 April 1992.

The Republic of Macedonia was recognised by the United Kingdom on 8 April 1993 when it was admitted to the United Nations.

The UK recognised the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in line with EU partners on 9 April 1996 following the change in regional circumstances post-Dayton.

Recognition followed advice given by the Badinter Arbitration Commission to the European Community Peace Conference on whether the Republics applying for recognition as independent states met all the conditions set in the European Community Declaration of 16 December 1991.

Defence Exports

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure that annual reports on defence exports contain a breakdown of licences refused. [81170]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The first Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls gives a breakdown of licences refused by country and by the Military List rating of the goods. The Government will review the level of information to be disclosed in future reports in the light of reactions to the first report.

International War Crimes Tribunal (Kosovo)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to ensure that *(a)* relevant intelligence information gathered by NATO in recent weeks is made available to the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and *(b)* the tribunal receives adequate resources to enable it to carry out its work in respect of events in Kosovo. [81649]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: A senior FCO official, David Gowan, has been appointed to be Kosovo War Crimes Coordinator. He will be responsible for ensuring that the Government pass as much information as possible, including intelligence, to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia that might be relevant to the Tribunal's investigations. The Tribunal's budget, set by the UN, is 51 per cent. larger this year than last. The Tribunal is devoting substantial effort to investigating events in Kosovo, but we are not aware that it needs additional funds at present.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional supplementary contributions the Government are giving to the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to enable it to carry out its work in relation to the events in Kosovo. [81730]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Government have already contributed £290,000 this year to support various aspects of the work of the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, in addition to the UK's assessed contribution for 1999 of US$5.08m. The Tribunal has not so far sought further financial contributions for its work on Kosovo. We will give careful consideration to any such requests should they be made. We are also considering certain requests for assistance in kind, in addition to the assistance with information on atrocities that we are already providing to the Tribunal.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ask the UN General Assembly to make a special allocation to the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia to meet the needs of the Tribunal arising from the events in Kosovo. [81729]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The United Nations General Assembly allocated the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia a budget for 1999 which was 51 per cent. greater than that allocated for 1998. The Tribunal has not so far sought a further budget provision to cover its work relating to Kosovo. We would give sympathetic consideration to any such request to the General Assembly.

Single Market

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress made under the United Kingdom presidency of the EU of the Single Market Action Plan by number of targets achieved; and how many targets were met during each other presidency. [81226]

Mr. Byers: I have been asked to reply.

The Single Market Action Plan, which was endorsed by the European Council in Amsterdam in June 1997, set an ambitious 18-month programme in the run-up to the introduction of the euro. Regular reports on the implementation of the Action Plan have been provided at six-monthly intervals by the Single Market Scoreboard. Three such Scoreboards were published during the lifetime of the Action Plan, during the Luxembourg, UK and Austrian Presidencies. It is clear that good progress has been made in implementing the measures contained in the Action Plan, as the Commission reports in its Communication assessing the Action Plan (COM(1999)74 Final of 18 February), and the UK Presidency played no small part in contributing to that success.

SCOTLAND

CS Sprays

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 8 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *57–58*, on CS sprays, if he will place in the Library a copy of the report arising out of the evaluation of the trial with CS sprays. [80816]

Mr. Henry McLeish: I am arranging for a copy of the police report to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Tree Planting

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is taking to increase the level of tree planting. [80371]

Mr. Macdonald: We are fully committed to increasing the area of woodland in Britain. The Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme and the Agriculture Department's Farm Woodland Premium Scheme both offer grants to landowners to establish new woodlands. The Woodland Grant Scheme also offers Challenge Funds and Locational Supplements to target new planting in certain areas and the Commission has a Land Regeneration Unit to encourage the conversion of derelict land to woodland. We launched a Forestry Strategy for England recently which will help focus our efforts to promote new planting; the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly in Wales will, of course, develop their own policies on forestry in Scotland and Wales.

TREASURY

Self-Assessment Tax Returns

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish the Inland Revenue Faster Working procedure used in the Wye Valley region of the Inland Revenue; [80253]

(2) which Inland Revenue regional offices offer the Faster Working procedure; [80254]

(3) what proportion and how many Inland Revenue inquiries have been conducted under the Faster Working procedure. [80255]

Dawn Primarolo: Under the Faster Working procedures, Inland Revenue inquiries into self-assessment tax returns may proceed according to a flexible timetable agreed between the inspector and the taxpayer or the taxpayer's agent. No statistics are maintained on the number of inquiries conducted under Faster Working. All Inland Revenue Regions offer Faster Working. There are agreed national guidelines for Faster Working, an outline of which has been published in Inland Revenue leaflet IR162.

Alcohol Duty Evasion

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the level of alcohol duty evasion in each of the last three years. [81055]

Mrs. Roche: HM Customs and Excise estimates for revenue evaded (excise duty and VAT) through cross-Channel smuggling of alcohol for the last three years are given in the table.

Table 1: Revenue evaded through cross-Channel smuggling of alcohol

£ million

	1996			1997			1998		
Product type	*Duty*	*VAT*	*Total*	*Duty*	*VAT*	*Total*	*Duty*	*VAT*	*Total*
Beer	95	45	135	95	50	150	120	65	185
Wine	45	20	60	40	20	60	45	20	65
Spirits	50	15	65	25	10	35	30	10	40
Total	185	80	265	165	80	240	915	95	290

Note:
Figures have been independently rounded to £5 million. Components may not therefore sum to the totals shown.

The above estimates exclude any amounts for revenue evaded through smuggling in freight consignments or diversion type fraud of alcoholic drinks.

Further details of the cross-border shopping and cross-Channel smuggling estimates are given in a technical report placed in the House of Commons Library on 19 November 1998.

Smuggled Alcohol

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the value of seizures of alcohol smuggled into the United Kingdom in each of the last three years. [81056]

Mrs. Roche: Since 1995 Customs have made the following seizures of alcohol smuggled into the United Kingdom.

Financial Year	*£ million*
1995–96	8.0
1996–97	11.7
1997–98	28.7

Figures for the 1998–99 Financial Year are currently being collated and assured.

Savings Ratio

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library calculations on a regular basis of the savings ratio disaggregated by income group. [81458]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply. The article referred to in his reply has been placed in the Library.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Jonathan Sayeed, dated 22 April 1999:

In the absence of the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the UK saving ratio.

The ONS calculates the UK saving ratio, and it is published in the *Quarterly National Accounts First Release* and *Economic Trends*. Both publications are available in the House of Commons Library. The ONS does not produce estimates of the saving ratio disaggregated by income group.

The ONS is developing a Social Accounting Matrix (SAM), which will produce estimates of income and expenditure disaggregated by industry and household type. This work could be extended to include a breakdown by income group, but we have no plans to do so at present. A SAM depends on the reconciliation of data from a number of sources, including household surveys, where sample sizes may not be sufficiently large to give robust estimates at the detailed level. Progress on the SAM project will be reported in *Economic Trends* in due course. A copy of an article by David Hughes, which appeared in *Economic Trends* in September 1996, giving the framework for the SAM, is attached for your information.

Maintenance Payments

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people will cease to receive tax relief on maintenance payments at *(a)* 10 per cent. and *(b)* 40 per cent. as a result of the change contained in the Finance Bill; [81586]

(2) how much revenue will be raised in 2000–01 as a result of the removal of tax relief for maintenance payments. [81588]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 20 April 1999]:* There will be around 350,000 people who will cease to receive relief on maintenance payments in 2000–01 as a result of the 1999 Budget proposals, of which some 310,000 will cease to receive relief at 10 per cent., 20,000 will lose relief at basic rate and 20,000 at higher rate.

There will be around £65 million raised for 2000–01 as a result of the removal of tax relief for maintenance payments. However, a new children's tax credit for families with children is being introduced in 2001–02. These reforms will modernise the personal tax system by getting rid of outdated allowances and bringing in a new relief which will concentrate resources where they are most needed—on families bringing up children.

Small Businesses

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action has been taken to implement the recommendations of the Bath report into the compliance costs to employers of operating PAYE and NICs. [82135]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to helping business in general, and small business in particular, meet their obligations by providing a range of help, guidance and assistance to them. The Budget contained a number of measures designed to increase support for small business including the creation of the Small Business Service and the new and improved services from the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise.

The Report by Bath University contained 31 recommendations for Government. Around two-thirds of the recommendations have been accepted. A note providing a more detailed response has been placed in the Library of the House.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the revenue generation from the proposed increase in the stamp duty charge on all off-market transfers of tradeable securities; and what assessment he has made of the impact on the savings industry and smaller investors of the increase; [R] [79937]

(2) if he will make a statement on the proposed increase in the stamp duty charge on all off-market transfers of tradeable securities; if this includes transfers into nominee registration, from 50p to £5; on what date the increase is planned to take effect; and what estimate his Department has made of the likely number of annual transfers to which this charge (i) would have applied in 1998–99 and (ii) will apply in 1999–2000. [R] [79936]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 13 April 1999]:* In order to streamline the administration of Stamp Duty, the Budget proposed that current charging provisions be standardised to provide for rounding up to a multiple of £5 in all cases, and that fixed stamp duties be set at £5. These changes will take effect from 1 October 1999. The proposals do not affect the stamp duty reserve tax charges on the bulk of share transactions, which are settled in dematerialised form within CREST.

About 1 million transfers of securities in a full year are expected to be subject to these reforms, yielding about £5 million. Most of these are fixed duty transfers involving nominees.

The impact of the new provision on the savings industry and on small investors is expected to be very small.

Speed Enforcement Cameras

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the local authority schemes that are being permitted to meet the funding costs of speed enforcement cameras from the money raised from fines and penalties; [80139]

(2) what criteria must be met for a local authority to be permitted to meet the funding costs of speed enforcement cameras from the money raised from fines and penalties. [80140]

Mr. Milburn: At present no local authorities, or other organisations, are permitted to retain the receipts from fines relating to speed enforcement camera convictions.

In December 1998 the Treasury issued a press notice setting out criteria against which requests to offset receipts from fines/penalties against Departmental Expenditure Limits can be assessed. The criteria aim to increase the effectiveness of enforcement while ensuring that such fines continue to be set on justice and deterrence principles and are not used as a means of raising revenue.

The costs associated with speed enforcement cameras are borne by a range of different organisations, including the police, courts and local authorities. DETR, Home Office and Lord Chancellor's Department are currently considering whether receipts from speed enforcement camera related fines would meet the criteria. We would need to be clear that the receipts could be properly apportioned between the authorities involved.

The criteria relate specifically to netting off receipts from expenditure in Departmental Expenditure Limits. They do not directly apply to any local authority self financed expenditure, which is not part of DEL. However, before allowing local authorities to retain a proportion of the receipts from speed camera related fines we would need to be satisfied that they would generally meet the same conditions.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the outcome of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 16 to 18 April; and if he will make a statement. [81687]

Ms Hewitt: There was an informal meeting of EU Finance and Economic Ministers and Central Bank Governors in Dresden on 16 to 18 April. In accordance with the usual procedures at these informal meetings, there were no decisions and no minutes were taken.

EU Alcohol Duties

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in euros the value of the tax and duty imposed on a litre of *(a)* wine, *(b)* beer and *(c)* spirits at 40 degree strength in each EU member state. [81728]

Mrs. Roche: The table shows the excise duty in euros and the percentage rate of VAT.

Because of the VAT component, the total tax will depend on retail selling prices in each member state. Comparable information on this is not available.

	Excise			VAT
	Wine	Beer	Spirits at 40°	percentage
	(euro per litre)			
Austria	0.0	0.2	2.9	20.0
Belgium	0.5	0.2	6.6	21.0
Denmark	0.9	0.5	14.7	25.0
Finland	2.4	1.4	20.4	22.0
France	0.0	0.1	5.8	20.6
Germany	0.0	0.1	5.2	16.0
Greece	0.0	0.2	3.8	18.0
Ireland	2.8	1.0	11.4	21.0
Italy	0.0	0.2	2.6	20.0
Luxembourg	0.0	0.1	4.1	15.0
Netherlands	0.5	0.2	6.0	17.5
Portugal	0.0	0.1	3.3	17.0
Spain	0.0	0.1	2.7	16.0
Sweden	3.2	0.9	23.8	25.0
UK	2.2	0.8	11.4	17.5

Note:
The figures shown for wine are for still table wine. For beer a strength of 5% alcohol by volume or 12.5 degrees Plato is assumed.
Source:
European Commission Excise Duty Tables. (Directorate General XXI) Excise Duty Tables (December 1998).

Friendly Societies

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on friendly societies of the introduction of *(a)* individual savings accounts, *(b)* individual learning accounts and *(c)* stakeholder pensions. [81693]

Ms Hewitt: Given their traditional roots and financial expertise, friendly societies are well placed to take advantage of the opportunities offered by individual savings accounts, individual learning accounts and stakeholder pensions.

Self-employed (National Insurance)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the oral answer to the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), 15 April 1999, *Official Report*, column 358, on national insurance and the self-employed, what factors underlie the difference between that answer and the figures in Table 1–11 of the Red Book. [81718]

Mrs. Roche: As explained in the Red Book (page 115, final paragraph) the figures in Table 1.11 are on a National Accounts Basis. For National Insurance Contributions this means that the figures depend on when the liability arises, not when the cash is expected to be received.

The question from the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) asked for the change in the amount to be paid by the self-employed in 2000–01, so the answer gave an estimate of the effect on actual National Insurance Contributions receipts in 2000–01.

Credit Unions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if mutual shares held by a credit union member held in a common bond can be one of his special savings schemes covered by ISAs. [81606]

Ms Hewitt: No. Shares in credit unions are not a qualifying investment for individual savings accounts.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Inspection Charges

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the flat rate charges envisaged under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Major Accident Hazards) Regulations will apply regardless of the seniority and experience of the inspector undertaking the inspections on site. [80279]

Mr. Meacher: Yes. All inspectors who carry out assessment or inspection under the Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1999 (COMAH) will be competent by virtue of their qualifications, training and experience to undertake the full range of work. The charge to industry will be at a single rate and is intended to recover the Competent Authority's full cost in line with HM Treasury's Fees and Charges Guide.

London Underground

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on *(a)* train, *(b)* signal and *(c)* track failures in each year since 1994–95 for each line of the London Underground. [81054]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Figures for train, signal and track failures on London Underground since 1994–95 are as follows:

Delays in	*Signal/points*	*Other track*	*Rolling stock*
1994–95	2,349	659	16,123
1995–96	2,494	959	15,192
1996–97	2,323	1,007	14,873
1997–98	2,725	881	17,801
1998–99	2,756	869	20,159

Figures for 1998–99 are provisional.

Figures on a line-by-line basis are not yet available and I will write to the honourable Member.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the maintenance and investment budget for rolling stock, signalling and track in each year since 1994–95, for each line of the London Underground. [81053]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Figures for the maintenance and investment spend for rolling stock, signalling and track on London Underground for the financial years 1994–95 to 1998–99 are set out in the following table.

£ million

	1994–95		1995–96		1996–97		1997–98		1998–99	
	Investment	Maintenance	Investment	Maintenance	Investment	Maintenance	Investment	Maintenance	Investment	Maintenance
Bakerloo										
Rolling Stock	8.9	4.2	1.6	4.0	1.8	4.0	3.3	4.6	6.2	4.6
Track	0.1	3.2	2.5	3.1	2.9	2.8	4.4	1.8	5.4	1.8
Signals	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.1	0.8	0.0	0.9	0.3	0.6
Central										
Rolling Stock	0.3	7.9	3.1	9.3	4.2	10.1	1.4	10.3	4.8	12.4
Track	10.2	7.8	18.5	6.7	17.0	6.9	17.1	7.5	16.3	8.2
Signals	21.0	2.7	7.3	3.1	5.1	4.2	10.3	4.8	15.4	4.8
District										
Rolling Stock	3.1	8.4	7.5	8.2	3.9	7.8	1.8	7.9	4.3	8.8
Track	1.6	7.4	10.4	5.4	5.2	6.4	6.9	5.1	4.2	6.6
Signals	0.4	2.1	2.1	2.3	1.7	2.5	1.8	2.6	3.7	3.1
Jubilee/ELL										
Rolling Stock	0.1	3.4	0.0	3.5	0.0	3.4	0.0	3.7	0.0	7.0
Track	1.0	2.6	5.1	2.7	7.2	3.2	7.4	3.2	1.0	3.4
Signals	2.7	0.9	2.8	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.2	1.1	0.0	1.9
Met/Circle										
Rolling Stock	13.0	13.8	23.0	12.4	15.4	12.3	16.3	12.3	1.0	14.6
Track	1.1	8.8	12.5	7.5	4.8	6.1	5.4	6.8	9.0	8.2
Signals	1.1	6.5	2.7	6.3	5.5	3.0	4.9	3.0	3.6	3.1
Northern										
Rolling Stock	10.6	9.1	4.7	10.5	0.5	10.9	5.0	14.1	5.5	14.1
Track	1.9	6.0	17.7	6.3	16.2	6.0	11.8	5.6	17.8	6.7
Signals	0.0	2.4	2.3	2.6	1.2	2.7	0.5	3.0	1.6	3.4
Piccadilly										
Rolling Stock	6.9	7.8	13.4	7.5	21.4	7.8	21.8	8.6	22.9	10.0
Track	2.0	6.1	9.0	6.0	2.6	6.7	3.7	7.0	9.4	7.7
Signals	0.7	2.1	1.2	2.2	1.0	2.1	0.3	2.4	0.1	2.4
Victoria										
Rolling Stock	10.0	6.2	0.4	6.4	0.4	6.5	1.1	6.3	0.7	6.7
Track	0.7	2.3	6.1	1.7	2.4	2.2	5.4	2.5	9.9	3.1
Signals	0.0	1.1	0.2	1.2	0.1	1.3	0.1	1.3	0.2	1.3
Network										
Rolling Stock	3.6	0.0	5.4	0.0	3.5	0.0	0.5	0.0	5.8	0.0
Track	33.8	0.0	15.1	0.0	5.6	0.0	1.1	0.0	14.5	0.0
Signals	1.7	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.9	3.8	0.5	3.5	2.8	3.5
Total	216.9	123.4	176.4	120.6	131.6	124.4	133.0	129.9	166.4	148.2

Notes:

Bakerloo

Rolling stock refurbishment was completed in 1994–95

Central

Entry into service of new rolling stock was completed in 1994–95

The line has been the major recipient of investment in track and signals over this period

Jubilee

Rolling stock maintenance costs in 1998–99 reflect the new, enlarged fleet

Figures exclude investment undertaken under the JLE project

Metropolitan/Circle

Refurbishment of the Metropolitan line fleet took place between 1994–95 and 1997–98

Northern

The line has seen major investment in track in readiness for the introduction of new rolling stock being provided under the PFI deal.

Rolling stock maintenance cost has increased during the new train delivery period.

Piccadilly

Rolling stock refurbishment commenced in 1994–95 and has been ongoing through the period

Victoria

Rolling stock refurbishment was completed in 1994–95

Network

Projects spanning more than one line are included here

In the early years, major track replacement was managed as a single project. In 1998–99, a separate project was established for track programme management.

From 1996–97 responsibility for routine signal equipment replacement, carried out according to a programme laid down by the Chief Engineer, was transferred to PSD Network Services. Previously the Metropolitan line managed this function on behalf of the network—and held the costs.

Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the members of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment, indicating their professional backgrounds in each case. [81346]

Mr. Meacher: This information is published in the advisory committee's annual report. A copy is in the Library, the relevant information is reproduced as follows:

Professor John Beringer

Professor of Molecular Genetics and Dean of Science, School of Biological Sciences, University of Bristol

Member of ACGM

Member of the Council of the Natural Environment Research Council

Dr. Philip Dale

Senior Research Scientist

John Innes Centre

Consultant to EC DGXI and UNIDO

Dr. Ian Garner

Assistant Director of Research, PPL Therapeutics, Roslin

Member of BBSRC's Genes in Developmental Biology Network

Professor Alan Gray

Head of Furzebrook Research Station, NERC Institute of Terrestrial Ecology

Honorary Professor, University of Southampton

Ms Julie Hill

Programme adviser to Green Alliance

Member of the Advisory Committee for the Pesticides Trust, Environmental Law Foundation, and Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and environmental advisory bodies for Shanks and McEwan plc and Southern Electricity.

Dr. Julian Kinderlerer

Senior Lecturer—Department of Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, University of Sheffield

Assistant Director—Institute of Biotechnology Law and Ethics, University of Sheffield

Member of ACGM

Consultant to UNIDO

Mr. John MacLeod

Director, National Institute of Agricultural Botany

Member, UK Plant Varieties and Seeds Committee

Member, Groupe Consultatif International de Recherche sur le Colza

Professor Bev Moseley

Retired, former Head of Institute Food Research, Reading Laboratory

Professor David Onions

Head of Department of Veterinary Pathology, University of Glasgow

Honorary Director of The Leukaemia Research Fund's Human Virus Centre

Consultant to Q-One Biotec

Adviser to Intervet International BV

Professor Nigel Poole

External and Regulatory Affairs Manager, Zeneca Plant Science, Brackn[illegible]

Honorary Professor, University of Aberdeen

Honorary Professor, John Moores University

Dr. David Robinson

Principal Research Scientist, Scottish Crop Research Institute

Honorary Lecturer, University of Dundee

Member of Genetic Manipulation Safety Committee at Nickerson Seeds' Castleton of Eassie site

Dr. Ingrid Williams

Principal Scientist

Leader of the Insect-Plant Interactions Group, Institute of Arable Crops Research Rothamsted

Honorary Research Associate IGER

Visiting Professor Estonian University of Agriculture

Chairman of International Commission for Plant–Bee Relationships

Council Member and Company director of International Bee Research Association

Dr. Katherine Venables

Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology at Imperial College School of Medicine at the National Heart and Lung Institute

Honorary Consultant Physician at the Royal Brompton Hospital, and Honorary Consultant in Public Health to the Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Health Authority.

Mobile Crane Drivers

Mr. Alan Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many drivers of mobile cranes have not been granted a Group 2 (category C) licence under the second EC Driving Licence Directive (91/439/EEC) and the implementing legislation (SI 1996/2824). [81244]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of mobile crane drivers that have not been granted a Group 2 (category C) licence under the second EC Driving Licence Directive (91/439/EEC) and the implementation legislation (SI 1996/2824) is not available.

Filling Stations (Alternative Fuels)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the oral answer of 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column 18, what estimate he has made of the number of filling stations which offer re-fuelling for *(a)* LPG and *(b)* compressed natural gas. [81383]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are an estimated 174 LPG refuelling points in the UK. Although these are generally open to the public, only about a dozen are sited on retail forecourts. The number of LPG refuelling points is expected to increase to around 500 over the next three years with most of the new refuelling points sited on the forecourt.

Refuelling points for compressed natural gas are predominantly depot based, though some permit third party access. There are around 30 fast-fill refuelling points in the UK suitable for fleet use and around 40 slow-fill refuelling points suitable for single vehicle refuelling. The number of fast-fill refuelling points is expected to double in the next year.

Water Rates

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he

has to change the base of water rates calculated from the rateable values of its 1990 list to more recent valuations. [81486]

Mr. Meale: Rateable values ceased to be used for local government taxation purposes in 1990. Since then there has been no provision for amending or updating rateable values.

We have made clear that we are willing to consider alternatives to the present system of unmeasured charging for water and sewerage services. We shall work with water companies and other groups with an interest to consider proposals for new charging arrangements. Any alternative system would need to provide for fair charges and any transition should be planned to avoid significant advert effects on particular groups of customers.

KPMG

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* consultancy and *(b)* other contracts his Department has had with KPMG since 1 May 1997; and if KPMG is a prospective candidate for future contracts his Department is intending to let. [81420]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 19 April 1999]:* Since 1 May 1997 my Department has utilised six contracts with KPMG for the provision of management consultancy, research consultancy and other specific consultancy (e.g. privatisation) services.

KPMG will continue to be considered for future contracts let by my Department where they are capable of meeting the requirement and are likely to offer best value for money, alongside any other organisations which meet the same criteria.

Environment Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the agenda for the forthcoming EU Environment Ministers meeting on 23 to 25 April; and if he will make a statement on his priorities for the meeting. [81489]

Mr. Meacher: This meeting of EU Environment Ministers planned for 23–25 April has been rescheduled for 7–9 May. It is an informal meeting. The following issues will be debated:

Integrated product policy: to explore the scope for promoting more sustainable goods and services;

Chemicals policy: to discuss progress on the review of EC policy on chemicals.

It has not been the practice of successive Administrations to indicate the position Ministers propose to take in advance of Council.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made on the possible level of energy savings to be achieved by improving the energy efficiency of buildings; [81454]

(2) what estimate he has made of the percentage of the country's energy used to heat and light buildings in the UK; [81455]

(3) what plans he has to increase the use of energy efficiency measures in *(a)* new and *(b)* existing buildings; [81456]

(4) what assessment he has made of the impact of improving energy efficiency in buildings on helping the Government to achieve their target for reducing carbon dioxide emissions. [81457]

Mr. Meale: Energy efficiency in buildings forms an essential part of the Government's strategy for meeting its targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide. Under the Kyoto Protocol the UK agreed to reduce its emissions of a basket of six greenhouse gases to 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels over the period 2008–12. In our manifesto we also set ourselves a domestic goal of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010.

Some initial assessments of the possible energy savings to be achieved by improving the energy efficiency of buildings were published in October 1998 in the Government's climate change consultation paper. The paper set out a number of options on how we might meet our climate change targets. For the domestic sector, we estimated that possible savings of up to 6.5 million tonnes of carbon per year (MtC/Y) by 2010 could be achieved by improving building standards. We also estimated that improvements to public sector buildings could deliver 1.1 MtC/y. The potential contribution of commercial and industrial buildings was estimated as part of the "business" sector and not separately identified in the consultation document. However, we estimated that it could be of the order of 5 MtC/y.

These carbon savings correspond to a reduction of 15 to 20 per cent. on the estimated carbon emissions for 2010 under "business as usual", that is, DTI's central estimate as published in Energy Paper 65.

Space heating and lighting across all building sectors currently account for 32 per cent. of total UK delivered energy consumption.

The DETR already funds a number of programmes and initiatives designed to improve energy efficiency, and increase the use of energy efficiency measures, in both new and existing buildings. These include the Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme, the UK's primary knowledge-based energy efficiency information transfer programme, designed to assist energy users and professionals in industry, commerce, the public and housing sectors and in business transport to improve their energy efficiency. Best Practice also supports research and development to help bring forward tomorrow's energy efficiency measures. The programme includes site specific and project specific consultancy advice on improving the energy efficiency of buildings.

The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) provides energy efficiency improvement grants for householders receiving income-related benefit, disability allowance or over 60 years of age.

The Energy Saving Trust continues to develop and implement a range of innovative projects aimed at promoting efficient use of energy in domestic and small business markets and supports Energy Efficiency Advice Centres and the "Energy Efficiency" campaign to promote energy efficiency in the domestic sector.

In addition, the Building Regulations are currently under review to see what maximum contribution they can make to achieving the Government's climate change targets whilst observing proportionality, maintaining acceptable design flexibility and avoiding unacceptable technical risks. The Government have announced their intention to consult on proposals for amendments later this year and the consultation documents will include assessments of the impact on greenhouse gas emissions if these proposals were to be adopted.

The Government are currently considering how to develop the substantial potential of these programmes and what further approaches could be undertaken as part of the development of a new UK Climate Change programme.

Genetically Modified Salmon

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the environmental consequences of the farming of genetically modified salmon. [81451]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 April 1999]:* No genetically modified salmon are currently being farmed in the UK, and no applications have been received for the release of genetically modified fish. However, the environmental consequences of the farming of genetically modified fish have been considered by the Department and by the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE).

The Department of the Environment published a research report on the *Genetic Modification of Fish—a UK Perspective* in November 1994. ACRE Guidance Note 8, issued in March 1997, provides guidance for experimental releases of genetically modified fish.

Research into GM fish has increased steadily since the first published reports in 1985 and the technology now exists for the routine modification of a variety of fish species. Some modified traits may affect the ecological range of a fish species, for example increasing the temperature range in which they are able to survive and breed. The implications of such changes would need to be carefully considered in the risk assessment before a release could take place.

The publications offer detailed recommendations on approaches to risk assessment and risk management for GM fish, and for emergency control measures. Guidelines are also provided for carrying out monitoring during and after the release.

Copies of both these publications are in the House of Commons Library.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to provide additional funding for areas of outstanding natural beauty; and if he will make a statement. [81614]

Mr. Meale: We have already announced an additional £2.5 million for the new Countryside Agency to spend in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and similar landscape areas in 1999–2000.

The former Countryside Commission has provided advice to the Government on various aspects of the care of protected landscapes. We are still considering all of the issues very carefully and hope to announce some conclusions soon.

Railway Stations (Staffing)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy on the staffing of main stations *(a)* at night and *(b)* at other times; what discussions he has had with (i) train operators and (ii) the rail regulator on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [81502]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 21 April 1999]:* There are no absolute requirements in franchise agreements for stations to be staffed at night or at other times. Train Operating Companies (TOCs) must maintain the existing presence of staff at stations to the hours at which trains call unless they provide substitute facilities in relation to customer information and waiting accommodation. All TOCs are party to the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement, overseen by the Rail Regulator, which includes obligations covering the hours during which ticket offices must be open and the range of products that must be offered for sale. These obligations are closely in line with the arrangements that existed prior to franchising. The hours of opening of ticket offices cannot be reduced without the permission of the Rail Regulator following a consultation process. No discussions have taken place with (i) the train operators and (ii) the rail regulator on this issue.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will discuss with *(a)* First North Western Trains and *(b)* other rail operators the effects of removing platform staff on passenger safety. [81503]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 21 April 1999]:* There are no absolute requirements in franchise agreements for platform staff at stations and this is not a health and safety issue. We do, however, consider it very important that passengers perceive the railway as a secure environment and over the past year, operators have been working with the Franchising Director, this Department and the British Transport Police, to deliver the Secure Stations Scheme, which was formally launched in April 1998. This will award accreditation to stations that reach specified standards in design and management, and demonstrate reductions in the crime level and in passengers' perception of crime. A number of stations across the country have now been accredited under the scheme and it is hoped that many more will become accredited in the near future.

The Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), which promotes network-wide projects, is implementing a Code of Practice on Passenger Security which identifies best practice, and encourages operators to co-operate with other organisations to improve security in and around stations.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will seek a report from the rail regulator on the possible effect

of the removal of platform staff from Warrington Central Station on the performance targets of First North Western trains. [81504]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 21 April 1999]:* Performance in terms of punctuality and reliability is governed by a financial penalties and incentive regime under the franchise agreement between the Franchising Director and First North Western Trains. That applies to results achieved without regard to the operational methods adopted by the Train Operating Company. I understand that First North Western Trains have suspended their plans for staffing reductions at Warrington Central Station and others in the area while they consult with interested groups, individuals and the trade unions.

Railway Passenger Safety

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with the rail operators on the need to ensure the safety of passengers travelling by train. [81505]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 21 April 1999]:* The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) monitors and enforces compliance with the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and its relevant statutory provisions to ensure that safety standards on the railway are maintained and improved where necessary. The HSE has regular meetings with train operators and infrastructure controllers to ensure the safety of passengers travelling by train.

Bus Passengers

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the percentage of the 1 per cent. increase in bus passengers which has resulted from passengers changing their mode of transport. [81716]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information does not exist for this estimate to be made. The one per cent. overall increase is the net result of many shifts and changing trends in trip making. However, in some cases where significant increases in bus use have occurred, for example following investment in new vehicles and bus priority traffic management measures, 10 per cent. or more of the increase has been estimated to represent former car users. Were this also to apply to the full year increase across England it would represent a reduction of about 3.5 million journeys by car.

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the number of local bus passenger journeys in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99 in (i) London, (ii) English metropolitan areas, (iii) English shire counties and (iv) England. [81714]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The figures up to 1997–98 are taken from tables 10, 13 and 16 of the Transport Statistics Report "Focus on Public Transport Great Britain: 1999 edition", published by The Stationery Office in February 1999. The most recent three years' data are summarised in the table below. Data for 1998–99 will not be available until towards the end of this year.

Local bus services: passenger journeys by area

million

	London	*English metropolitan areas*	*English shire counties*	*England*
1995–96	1,205	1,292	1,265	3,762
1996–97	1,242	1,246	1,265	3,753
1997–98	1,294	1,237	1,248	3,779

Regional Airports

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those countries which have *(a)* agreed, *(b)* failed to agree and *(c)* not responded to his statement of 10 June 1998 on multilateral agreements on 3rd and 4th freedoms at regional airports. [81713]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Following my statement on international access to regional airports in June 1998 my officials approached countries with whom we have air services relations. The following responses have been received:

(a) Agreed

Bahrain, Belarus, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Fiji, Jamaica, Jordan, South Korea, Malaysia, Maldives, Namibia, Pakistan, Qatar, Tanzania, Turkmenistan.

(b) Failed to agree

Armenia, Botswana, Brazil, Egypt, Georgia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mauritius, Moldova, Mongolia, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen.

(c) Not responded

Algeria, Antigua & Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Brunei, Bangladesh, Chile, Cote D'Ivoire, Congo, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Iran, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Oman, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Vietnam, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Category (c) includes countries with whom there are on-going official discussions about the offer.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to issue the Management Statement for the Countryside Agency. [82052]

Mr. Meacher: I am pleased to be able to inform the House that the Management Statement has been issued to the Countryside Agency today. The Statement describes the relationship between the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Agency, sets out the role and status of the Agency and covers its accountability to Parliament. It also contains information on the role and responsibilities of the Chairman, Board and Chief Executive, and briefly describes the Agency's organisation.

A copy of the Statement has today been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

DEFENCE

Firearms Training (Young People)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the types of (i) public and (ii) private institution falling within his area of responsibility in which individuals aged under 18 years may be trained in the use of firearms; and if he will estimate the numbers of individuals receiving such training in each type of institution in each of the last five years. [81136]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Individuals under 18 years of age undertake firearms training in the Regular Forces, Reserves and Cadets. Institutions which carry out such training include recruit schools for initial firearms training, various military units for specific and refresher training and local establishments in the case of Cadets. The three Services do not keep centralised records of such training and, therefore, it is not possible to provide accurate figures of numbers of under 18s who undertake firearms training. Even an estimate could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces (Under 18s)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if under 18 year olds are currently being deployed in the UK armed forces in the former Yugoslavia. [81437]

Mr. George Robertson: There are currently 22 service personnel aged under 18 deployed in the UK armed forces in the former Yugoslavia.

Military Hospitals

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was *(a)* paid and *(b)* rebated to his Department by each of the health trusts in which MDHUs operate for the treatment of civilian personnel by the military in each of the last three years. [80573]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Until 31 March 1999, the contribution made by military clinical staff serving in MDHUs to the treatment of civilian patients was treated as a "free good" from my Department to the NHS. Accordingly, no payments were made to my Department by the host Trusts, either directly or by way of a rebate on other charges, for the treatment of civilian personnel by the military.

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *17–18*, how many times Ministers in his Department met their counterparts in the US Administration between 1 January 1998 and 1 June 1998, indicating the dates and locations of each meeting, the Ministers involved and the name of the US counterpart. [80824]

Mr. George Robertson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Military Training

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if British military personnel have visited the School of the Americas training establishment at the United States Army base at Fort Benning, Georgia, in each of the last eight years. [81375]

Mr. Doug Henderson: There have been no visits to the School of the Americas training establishment by UK-based military personnel during the last five years, the period for which we have been able to establish figures. The previous British Liaison Officer at Fort Benning, Georgia, made one visit to the School of the Americas training establishment during 1997 as part of his liaison responsibilities. He undertook no training.

War Pensions

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to remove the differences within the War Pensions Scheme as between former officers and other ranks. [81485]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The War Scheme is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. The MOD and DSS are currently reviewing arrangements for compensating service personnel or their bereaved where disablement or death is due to service in the Forces. The aim is to make proposals for a new compensation scheme that could replace the current War Pension Scheme and the attributable provisions of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. The War Pension Scheme would remain available for those who have already left the forces including current war pensions.

At present former officers and other ranks received the same level of War Disablement Pension or Gratuity under the War Pension Scheme for the same degree of assessed disablement and regardless of rank. The level of War Widow's Pension, however, is still related to the rank held by the deceased husband in service.

A separate review is also being conducted of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. This review is examining all the main provisions of that Scheme, including the continuing justification for any differences of treatment between officers and other ranks.

Defence Estates Organisation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what value of stationery, signage and documentation formerly owned by the Defence Estates Organisation will not be used by Defence Estates, established on 29 March; [81628]

(2) what was the cost of the relaunch of the Defence Estates Organisation. [81629]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Military Deployment

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current proportion of *(a)* the Army and *(b)* Land Command (i) committed and (ii) warned to deploy for operations. [81668]

Mr. Doug Henderson: As at 15 April, the figures requested were as follows:

	Percentage	
	Committed to Operations	*Warned to deploy on operations*
Army personnel	36.1	22.5
Land Command personnel	55.3	34.5

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the TA is (i) deployed and (ii) warned to deploy for operations in the Balkans. [81664]

Mr. George Robertson: 420 members of the Territorial Army (TA) are currently deployed to the Balkans, the majority in Bosnia, and these represent some 0.74 per cent. of the overall TA. It is likely that a further 80 will be deployed shortly, representing a further 0.14 per cent. of the TA.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Army's armoured infantry battalions and mechanised infantry battalions are *(a)* currently employed on operations and *(b)* warned to deploy for operations. [81660]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Three such battalions are currently deployed on operations, and two are warned to deploy.

Brigade Reinforcements (Macedonia)

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what units from 19 Brigade have reinforced 4 Armoured Brigade for its deployment to Macedonia. [81663]

Mr. George Robertson: One company from the 1st Battalion The King's Own Royal Border Regiment, including 30 personnel each from the 1st Battalion The Highlanders and 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment, is currently deployed to the Balkans as part of the 4th Armoured Brigade. In addition, 19 Brigade Provost Unit (Royal Military Police) is currently in the process of returning to the United Kingdom from the Balkans.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80755]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* The information on appointees who receive an annual remuneration or salary is listed in the following table. Some other appointees may receive a daily remuneration (pro-rated where necessary) where the public body has the statutory power to make such a payment.

Sponsored Body	*Role*	*Title*	*First name*	*Surname*	*Remuneration*
British Library Board	Chairman	Dr.	John	Ashworth	28,363
British Library Board	Member	Prof.	Michael	Anderson	6,839
British Library Board	Member	Sir	Matthew	Farrer	6,839
British Library Board	Member	Right hon.	Peter	Hordern	6,839
British Library Board	Member	Mr.	Rodney	Leach	6,839
British Library Board	Member	Ms	Penelope	Lively	6,839
British Library Board	Member	Mr.	Bernard	Naylor	6,839
British Library Board	Member	Mr.	John	Ritblat	6,839
British Library Board	Member	Vis	Walter	Runciman	6,839
British Library Board	Member	Mr.	Paul	Scherer	6,839
British Tourist Authority	Chairman	Dr.	David	Quarmby	28,305
British Tourist Authority	Member	Mr.	Robert	Ayling	7,340
British Tourist Authority	Member	Mr.	Alan	Britten	7,340
British Tourist Authority	Member	Mr.	John	Jarvis	7,340
British Tourist Authority	Member	Mr.	Patrick	McKenna	7,340
British Tourist Authority	Member	Mr.	Des	Wilson	7,340
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Chairman	Vacant			46,792
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Deputy Chairman	Ms	Jane	Leighton	37,250
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Deputy Chairman	Mrs.	Suzanne	Warner	35,350
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Member	Ms	Danielle	Barr	14,960
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Member	Mr.	David	Boulton	14,960
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Member	Dr.	Fiona	Caldicott	14,960
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Member	Mr	Strachan	Heppell	14,960
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Member	Rev.	Rose	Hudson-Wilkin	14,960
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Member	Mr.	Robert	Kernohan	14,960
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Member	Mr.	Uday	Dholakia	14,960
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Member	Ms	Sally	O'Sullivan	14,960
Broadcasting Standards Commission	Member	Mrs.	Sioned	Wyn Thomas	14,960
Channel 4 Television Corporation[1]	Chairman	Mr.	Vanni	Treves	59,310
Channel 4 Television Corporation[1]	Deputy Chairman	Mr.	Barry	Cox	18,260
Channel 4 Television Corporation[1]	Member	Mr.	Murray	Grigor	13,690
Channel 4 Television Corporation[1]	Member	Mr.	Andrew	Graham	13,690
Channel 4 Television Corporation[1]	Member	Mr.	Joe	Sinyor	13,690
Channel 4 Television Corporation[1]	Member	Ms	Usha	Prashar	13,690
Channel 4 Television Corporation[1]	Member	Mr.	Robin	Miller	13,690
Channel 4 Television Corporation[1]	Member	Ms	Sarah	Radclyffe	13,690
English Heritage[2]	Chairman	Sir	Jocelyn	Stevens	76,980
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Ms	Amanda	Arrowsmith	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Mrs.	Bridget	Cherry	2,160–15,150

Sponsored Body	Role	Title	First name	Surname	Remuneration
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Councillor	Philip	Davis	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Mr.	Andrew	Fane	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Lord	Charles	Faringdon	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Prof.	Eric	Fernie	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Lady	Elizabeth	Gass	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	HRH	Richard	Gloucester	[3]2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Mr.	Lloyd	Grossman	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Mrs.	Candida	Lycett Green	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Ms	Kirsty	McLeod	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Mr.	Richard	Morris	2,160–15,150
English Heritage[2]	Commissioner	Miss	Susan	Underwood	2,160–15,150
English Sports Council	Chairman	Mr.	Trevor	Brooking	23,132
English Sports Council	Vice-Chairman	Mr.	Gerald	Dennis	13,945
English Sports Council	Vice-Chairman	Mr.	Des	Wilson	13,945
English Tourist Board	Chairman	Dr.	David	Quarmby	28,305
English Tourist Board	Member	Mr.	Peter	Chappelow	7,340
English Tourist Board	Member	Mr.	David	Lunn	7,340
English Tourist Board	Member	Mr.	Peter	Moore	7,340
English Tourist Board	Member	Ms	Eve	Pollard	7,340
English Tourist Board	Member	Mrs.	Jennifer	Robson	7,340
Football Licensing Authority	Chairman	Mr.	Clive	Sherling	13,105
Football Licensing Authority	Member	Dr.	Judith	Fisher	[3]240
Football Licensing Authority	Member	Mr.	Tony	Gee	[3]240
Football Licensing Authority	Member	Mr.	Christopher	Lewis	[3]240
Football Licensing Authority	Member	Mr.	Mervyn	Sheldon	[3]240
Football Licensing Authority	Member	Prof.	Margaret	Talbot	[3]240
Football Licensing Authority	Member	Dr.	Sam	Thorburn	[3]240
Independent Televisiion Commission	Chairman	Sir	Robin	Biggam	69,780
Independent Television Commission	Deputy Chairman	Lord	Richard	Holme	17,910
Independent Television Commission	Member	Mr.	Alistair	Balls	13,430
Independent Television Commission	Member	Dr.	John	Beynon	13,430
Independent Television Commission	Member	Sir	Michael	Checkland	13,430
Independent Television Commission	Member	Ms	Jude	Goffe	13,430
Independent Television Commission	Member	Mr.	John	Ranelagh	13,430
Independent Television Commission	Member Northern Ireland	Dr.	Maria	Moloney	13,430
Independent Television Commission	Member Scotland	Dr.	Michael	Shea	13,430
National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts	Chairman	Lord	David	Puttnam	22,000
National Lottery Charities Board	Chairman	The hon.	David	Sieff	24,000
National Lottery Charities Board[2]	Member England	Mrs.	Stella	Clarke	12–16,000
National Lottery Charities Board[2]	Member N. Ireland	Mr.	John	Simpson	12–16,000
National Lottery Charities Board[2]	Member UK	Mrs.	Amanda	Jordan	12–16,000
National Lottery Charities Board[2]	Member UK	Sir	Adam	Ridley	12–16,000
National Lottery Charities Board[2]	Member Wales	Mr.	Tom	Jones	12–16,000
National Lottery Charities Board[2]	Member Scotland	Mr.	Garth	Morrison	12–16,000
National Lottery Charities Board[2]	Member NI	Mr.	Noel	Stewart	12–16,000
National Lottery Commission	Chairman	Mr.	Brian	Pomeroy	[4]84,275
National Lottery Commission	Commissioner	Dame	Helena	Shovelton	[4]43,270
National Lottery Commission	Commissioner	Ms	Harriet	Spice	[4]43,270
National Lottery Commission	Commissioner	Mr.	Robin	Squire	[4]43,270
National Lottery Commission	Commissioner	Ms	Hilary	Blume	[4]43,270
New Opportunities Fund	Chairman	Lady	Jill	Pitkeathley	22,000
Public Lending Right Registrar	Registrar	Dr.	James	Parker	33,797
Rádio Authority	Chairman	Sir	Peter	Gibbings	52,330
Radio Authority	Deputy Chairman	Mr.	Michael	Moriaty	17,910
Radio Authority	Member	Mrs.	Sheila	Hewitt	8,960
Radio Authority	Member	Mr.	Andrew	Reid	8,960
Radio Authority	Member	Mr.	Michael	Reupke	8,960
Radio Authority	Member	Mr.	Feargal	Sharkey	8,960
Radio Authority	Member	Lady		Sheil	8,960
Radio Authority	Member	Mrs.	Helen	Tennant	8,960
Radio Authority	Member	Mr.	David	Witherow	8,960
S4C	Chairman	Ms	Elan	Stephens	40,400
S4C	Member	Ms	Enid	Hafwen Rowlands	7,460
S4C	Member	Mr.	Cefin	Campbell	7,460
S4C	Member	Mr.	Peter	Davies	7,460
S4C	Member	Ms	Janet	Lewis-Jones	7,460
S4C	Member	Mr.	Nic	Parry	7,460
S4C	Member	Mrs.	Janice	Rowlands	7,460
United Kingdom Sports Council	Chairman	Sir	Rodney	Walker	23,132

[1] The Secretary of State for DCMS only has an approving role in these appointments.
[2] Remuneration is shown as a range where it is depending on changeable factors (membership of committees etc).
[3] Remuneration not claimed.
[4] Pro rata
[5] Per day

Note:
Except where specified, all remuneration is shown on an annual basis.

Millennium Landmark Projects

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) which millennium landmark projects have undergone changes from the original approved scheme; which schemes were involved; and what changes have been made; [81605]

(2) how many millennium landmark projects have had significant elements removed from the original approved scheme; and which elements have been lost. [81604]

Mr. Chris Smith: These are matters for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as Chairman of the Commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

CABINET OFFICE

People's Panel

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list *(a)* what items of research have been commissioned from the People's Panel by Government (i) departments, (ii) agencies and (iii) non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* their purposes and *(c)* their cost. [80690]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The following is the information:

Department	*Purpose*	*Cost (£)*
Cabinet Office	Collection of baseline data on public services, which will be used for tracking	221,900
Cabinet Office	Second wave of research (3,000 telephone interviews) into attitudes to a wide range of services, with a particular focus on transport, local democracy and complaints handling	89,000
Women's Unit Cabinet Office	To complement the Ministerial Roadshow element of the Listening to Women exercise which aims to identify issues of importance to women. (24 focus groups)	63,800
Cabinet Office	To collect the experiences of citizens using public services to evaluate how well Departments and agencies work together to deliver a joined-up service, and identify suggestions for improvement. The work was commissioned as part of the research for the Modernising Government White Paper. (14 depth interviews)	12,750
DfEE	To investigate parents' attitudes to value added information in school performance tables (6 focus groups)	12,400
Office of Science and Technology, DTI	To explore public attitudes to biosciences regulatory system (1,000 face-to-face interviews)—research not yet complete	90,000

A third wave of qualitative research has also been commissioned (the results of which will be published in July) comprising:

Department	*Purpose*	*Cost (£)*
Post Office Counters	Attitudes access to central and local government services using 'one-stop shops'.	17,000
Health and Safety Executive	Gas safety and regulation	14,750
DETR	Research to support the Urban White Paper and Housing Green Paper	19,500
DfEE	Public attitudes to the 'Listening House'	2,500
Cabinet Office	Standards of service the public receive when they contact local and central government agencies	6,000

SOCIAL SECURITY

Motability Scheme

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total expenditure on the Motability scheme in each of the last five years for which figures are available; [81397]

(2) how many manufacturers supplied vehicles under the Motability scheme in each of the last five years for which figures are available; [81399]

(3) how many vehicles were bought under the Motability scheme in each of the last five years for which figures are available; [81398]

(4) what is the maximum amount of money available to a claimant under the Motability scheme to assist in the purchase of a vehicle. [81400]

Mr. Bayley: The information is in the tables.

Total Gross Departmental Expenditure on the Motability Scheme in each of the last five financial years

	1994–95 outturn	*1995–96 outturn*	*1996–97 outturn*	*1997–98 outturn*	*£ million 1998–99 estimated outturn*
Motability Administration	3	4	4	5	5
Motability Equipment/Drivers Fund	2	3	3	4	5
Total Motability Expenditure	5	7	7	8	9

Note: Figures rounded to the nearest million. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

The number of manufacturers, including vehicle conversion specialists, who have supplied vehicles under the Motability Scheme in each of the last five calendar years

Year	Number
1994	20
1995	20
1996	23
1997	25
1998	27

The total number of vehicles bought under the Motability Scheme in each of the last five years

Year	Number
1994	90,125
1995	105,025
1996	125,529
1997	137,509
1998	132,698

The maximum amount of money available to a claimant under the Motability scheme to assist in the purchase of a vehicle is the weekly amount of the benefits which allow access to the Scheme. These are £41.25 and £37.00 for War Pensioners Mobility Supplement and the Higher Rate Mobility Component of Disability Living Allowance respectively. Also, grants are available from Motability's charitable funds along with the Mobility Equipment Fund and Drivers Fund. There vary in amount from small sums to pay for initial deposits and grants of over £30,000 depending on the type of driving solution recommended by Motability. In respect of grants, Motability does ask its customers to contribute as much as they reasonably can towards the cost of their vehicle.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants are awaiting the determination of appeals against loss of reduced earnings allowance. [81427]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested as the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS) do not record the reason for appeals against different benefit types. Such information as is available is as follows.

The latest available figures show that as at October 1998, the total number of appeals involving Reduced Earnings Allowance awaiting hearing was 2,618.

Source:

100 per cent. computer extract from the ITS Generic Appeals Processing System (GAPS).

Post Office (Bar-code Scanners)

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the installation of bar-code scanners for girocheques in post offices is a term of the Department's contract with the Post Office. [81696]

Angela Eagle: The installation of bar-code scanners in post offices is not a term of the Department's contracts with Post Office Counters Ltd. (POCL), nor is it a term of the Department's contract with Girobank plc who, in turn, contract with POCL for the encashment of girocheques at post offices.

Pensioners (Average Incomes)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the most recent estimates of the average incomes of pensioners in OECD countries as a proportion of average earnings. [81733]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Kosovo Refugees

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to take steps to enable refugees from Kosovo to accept temporary work on the land in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [81566]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

Evacuees from Kosovo who arrive in the United Kingdom under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Humanitarian Evacuation Programme will be granted exceptional leave to enter and, as a consequence, permitted to take employment immediately. In common with asylum applicants of other nationalities, those from Kosovo who have arrived independently in the United Kingdom will be entitled to seek permission to take employment if they have been waiting for a decision on their case for six months.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many refugees from Kosovo she expects will be given shelter in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [81564]

Mr. Straw: I have been asked to reply.

The primary aim of the Government is to care for refugees in the region, and to facilitate their return to Kosovo. We are working together with our European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation partners and with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

We have long made clear that we stand ready to respond to requests for UNHCR to take vulnerable refugees from Kosovo on a temporary basis. We have agreed with UNHCR that any recommendations for evacuation from the region should be co-ordinated through the office of the UNHCR.

I announced on 20 April that arrangements had been agreed for the admission of 120 evacuees, mainly women and children, expected in the next few days. This decision was made following advice from UNHCR that the refugees were deemed to be vulnerable and in need of temporary protection outside the region.

HEALTH

Asset Sales

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by region, the income to each NHS trust and health authority, in each of the last 10 years for the sale of assets, land and properties; what uses this income has been put to; and what estimate he has made by region, of the income to each NHS trust and health authority, for each of the next 10 years, from the sale of assets, land and property. [76478]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* Information on the income of each National Health Service trust and health authority from the sale of assets, land and properties from 1991/92 has been placed in the Library. Information in respect of earlier years is not available.

Income from the sale of assets is available for re-use within the NHS.

Information is not available centrally on individual NHS trust and health authority forecasts of future income from the sale of assets, land and property.

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all those task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 which have set up *(a)* sub-groups, *(b)* working parties and *(c)* other subsidiary committees, [79266]

Ms Jowell: Most task forces and reviews are short-term bodies established to give thorough consideration to important and difficult issues. Each establishes the working methods best suited to carrying out the work in the time available, and would normally provide a summary of its working methods in its report. Given the short term nature of task forces and reviews it is unlikely that many of them will set up sub-groups, working parties or subsidiary committees. However, this information is not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for all task forces and policy reviews with external members established by his Department since May 1997 *(a)* their dates of establishment, *(b)* those which have issued final reports and their dates of publication, *(c)* those which have been terminated and their dates of termination and *(d)* for those bodies still in existence, expected reporting and termination dates. [79284]

Ms Jowell: The reviews and taskforces, established since 1 May 1997 which have published their final reports are:

Review of cervical screening services at Kent and Canterbury Hospitals NHS Trust (established 23 June 1997; published 20 October 1997)

Review of the law relating to surrogacy (established 11 June 1997; published October 1998)

Review of evidence relating to silicone breast implants (established May 1997, published July 1998)

Review of the breast screening programme in Devon and the implications for the breast screening programme as a whole (established 9 June 1997; published 3 November 1997)

Strategic review of Health Services in London (established 20 June 1997; published 18 November 1997)

Review of the latest information available on inequalities in Health (established 11 July 1997, published 26 November 1998)

Independent review of proposals for the transfer of bulk blood processing and testing from Liverpool to Manchester (established 14 August 1997, published 8 April 1998)

Review of NHS Charter (established June 1997, published December 1998)

Review of Prescribing, Supply and Administration of Medicines (established 21 March 1997; reports published 8 March 1999)

Ministerial task force on the Government's response to the Children's Safeguards Review (established November 1997; published 5 November 1998)

Review of the written consent requirements in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 (established 6 February 1997; published June 1998).

The reviews and taskforces, established since May 1997, which have yet to publish reports are:

Mental Health Act Review (established September 1998, estimated publication date autumn 1999)

Thoracic Surgical Services Review (established July 1998, estimated publication date May 1999)

United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority Review (established September 1998, estimated publication date May 1999)

Review of general anaesthesia and sedation with dental treatment (established October 1998, publication date to be decided)

Review of the wheelchair voucher scheme and the provision of electrical and indoor wheelchairs (established November 1998, estimated publication date Spring 1999)

Eight regional task forces to support the Waiting List Action Team (established November 1997, on-going activity with no final report expected)

NHS efficiency task force (established June 1997, on-going activity with no final report expected)

NHS task force on staff involvement (established March 1998, estimated publication date spring 1999)

A and E Modernisation Team (established in March 1999, first annual report due in April 2000)

Independent review of mobile phone use (announced 8 April 1999, terms of reference and membership to follow).

Normally termination of a review or task force coincides with publication of a final report. However, two are on-going activities from which no single final report is expected, and one (marked †) will continue to meet beyond the date of publication shown.

Schoolchildren

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the changes in the last five years in the average weight and height of schoolchildren in England and Wales; and if he will ist the changes in the last five years in the (i) consumption of *(a)* dietary carbohydrate and *(b)* refined sugar products and (ii) total calorie intake and average levels of exercise of schoolchildren. [78135]

Ms Jowell *[pursuant to her reply, 26 March 1999, c. 424–25]:* I regret that my previous answer contained

incorrect information for 1995 for the weight of girls aged 11–15. I am also now in a position to provide the information on heights and weights for 1997 separately. The revised reply is as follows:

The heights and weights of primary schoolchildren were monitored in England between 1972 and 1994 by the National Study of Health and Growth (NSHG). No similar information is available for Wales. In 1995, the Health Survey for England (HSE) took over the monitoring of heights and weights of children and also measured their physical activity in 1997. The data for 1995 and 1996 were published in HSE Reports and the combined data for 1995–97 were published in December 1998 in the Report "The Health of Young People '95–'97".

The tables give heights and weights for 5 to 10 year olds for 1994 from NSHG and from HSE for 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1995–97 combined and on the same basis for comparison purposes with NSHG for 1995–97 combined. Heights and weights for children aged 11 to 15 years in 1995, 1996, and 1997 are given, along with the data for 1995–97 combined, which are the baseline from which changes will be monitored.

The extensive data on the types and levels of exercise among English schoolchildren in 1997 are given in tables 8.1 to 8.15 in the Report "The Health of Young People '96–'97". In Wales, the Youth Health Surveys carried out by Health Promotion Wales have shown that among 11 to 16 year olds, the proportion exercising for at least 4 hours per week outside school was 24 per cent. in 1994 and 29 per cent. in 1996.

There are no recent data on the consumption of dietary carbohydrate, refined sugar products, and total calorie intake of schoolchildren. However, fieldwork for the National Diet and Nutritional Survey of young people aged 4–18 years which covered Great Britain has been completed and the results are being analysed. This should provide data on all these factors and also on average levels of exercise. A report is expected at the end of this year.

Average weights (kilogrammes) of English primary schoolchildren

Age at last birthday (years)	*National Study of Health and Growth 1994* [1]	*Health Survey for England 1995–97* [1]	*Health Survey for England*			
			1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1995–97*
Boys						
5	19.8	19.7	20.5	20.1	20.6	20.4
6	22.1	22.3	22.4	23.1	23.1	22.9
7	24.8	25.1	25.4	26.0	25.7	25.8
8	27.7	28.4	29.1	28.8	29.4	29.1
9	31.4	31.1	32.4	32.1	31.6	32.0
10	34.8	34.7	35.0	35.9	35.7	35.6
Girls						
5	19.3	19.6	20.6	20.5	20.1	20.4
6	22.0	22.2	22.7	22.6	23.1	22.8
7	24.9	25.2	26.0	26.0	25.6	25.9
8	27.7	28.4	29.3	28.1	29.2	28.8
9	31.9	31.9	31.9	33.5	32.9	32.7
10	35.5	36.6	38.3	36.9	36.3	37.1

[1] White children only

Average heights (centimetres) of English primary schoolchildren

Age at last birthday (years)	*National Study for Health and Growth 1994* [1]	*Health Survey for England 1995–97* [1]	*Health Survey for England*			
			1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1995–97*
Boys						
5	113	112	112	112	112	112
6	119	119	119	119	119	119
7	125	125	125	125	125	125
8	131	131	131	131	131	131
9	137	136	136	136	136	136
10	141	141	141	141	142	141
Girls						
5	111	112	113	112	112	112
6	118	118	119	117	119	118
7	124	124	123	125	124	124
8	130	130	130	130	130	130
9	136	136	135	136	136	136
10	141	142	143	142	141	142

[1] White children only

Heights and weights of English children aged 11–15 years
Health Survey for England

Age at last birthday (years)	Weight (kg) 1995	1996	1997	1995–97	Height (cm) 1995	1996	1997	1995–97
Boys								
11	40.9	40.1	39.7	40.2	147	147	147	147
12	44.8	44.9	44.6	44.8	153	152	152	153
13	51.6	50.1	50.7	50.8	162	159	159	160
14	57.0	56.4	55.8	56.4	166	165	165	166
15	62.6	62.3	63.8	62.9	172	172	172	172
Girls								
11	43.0	42.0	42.3	42.4	148	148	149	148
12	45.9	49.1	47.4	47.5	154	154	154	154
13	51.0	51.1	53.3	51.8	158	158	158	158
14	57.1	56.4	56.7	56.7	162	161	161	161
15	58.3	57.7	59.3	58.4	163	161	163	162

HIV

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the anonymised programme of HIV surveillance in England and Wales, setting out for each survey currently in operation or planned *(a)* the location, *(b)* the targeted populations, *(c)* the clinical reasons for initial collection of specimens, *(d)* the number of specimen collection venues, *(e)* the annual specimen numbers, *(f)* the most recent prevalence data, *(g)* whether the consent of those tested was sought for entry into the survey and *(h)* whether those tested were informed that they were to be entered into the survey. [80695]

Ms Jowell: The Unlinked Anonymous monitoring programme monitors the prevalence of HIV infection in accessible groups of the population and is a unique source of unbiased prevalence data. An important aspect of the programme is that it estimates prevalent infections among groups in whom substantial proportions of infections remain undiagnosed and therefore unreported through other surveillance systems.

The data collected in the unlinked anonymised programme of HIV surveillance in England and Wales are published every year so that they can be used by those planning services or health promotion. Copies of the latest annual report "Prevalence of HIV in England and Wales 1997", annual report of the Unlinked Anonymous Prevalence Monitoring Programme and the summary report are available in the Library. Prevalence of HIV in England and Wales 1997, a summary of data to the end of 1997, is also available on the Department's internet site. These publications provide full information on the surveys which were carried out in 215 centres in 1997 throughout England and Wales. The tables summarise the main data requested on location, targeted populations, clinical reason for initial sample collection, number of specimen collection venues, annual specimen number and prevalence data.

With regard to obtaining consent for entry into the survey and informing patients about the surveys, posters and leaflets about the surveys are available in 15 different languages for participating centres to display and thus inform patients that their sample may be used in these surveys. These materials explain the aims of the UA surveys and that the programme is designed to ensure that the samples are anonymised before being tested and thus the results cannot be traced back to individuals. They also refer patients to healthcare workers for further information and explain that they can ask to exclude their samples from the surveys if they so wish, and that their wishes will be respected.

Unlinked anonymous seroprevalence monitoring programme: populations under surveillance and programme surveys

Population under surveillance	Programme surveys[1]	Clinical reason for collection of specimen	Location
Behaviourally vulnerable			
Homosexual and bisexual men	Genitourinary medicine clinic attenders	Syphilis serology	National
Heterosexual men and women with greater than average sexual partner change	Genitourinary medicine clinic attenders	Syphilis serology	National
Injecting drug users	Treatment and support agencies for injecting drug users[2]	Voluntary collection of saliva. This survey also detects evidence of current and prior infection with hepatitis B	National
At lower or general risk			
Pregnant women	Infant dried blood spot	Guthrie cards for metabolic screening	National
	Antenatal	Rubella serology	London
	Termination of pregnancy	Blood grouping	London
Adults aged 16 to 49 years	Patients treated in hospital	Blood counts	London

[1] In addition, a voluntary unlinked anonymous HIV survey of prisoners (using saliva specimens) was piloted in 1993 and undertaken in 1997.
[2] The genitourinary medicine clinic survey also provides prevalence data for injecting drug users.

Prevalence of HIV-1 infection in the survey groups, 1997

Survey	London				England and Wales outside London				
	Number tested	*Number HIV-1 infected*	*Per cent. HIV-1 infected*	*Prevalence range per cent.*	*Number tested*	*Number HIV-1 infected*	*Per cent. HIV-1 infected*	*Prevalence range (%)*[1]	*Prevalence ratio London vs elsewhere*[2]
Male									
Genitourinary medicine clinic attenders:									
Homo/bisexual	4,344	392	9.0	4.9–15	1,523	58	3.8	0–8.0	2.4
Heterosexual	13,504	108	0.8	0.43–1.4	16,821	21	0.12	0–0.29	6.4
Injecting drug users attending agencies[3]	406	16	3.9	—	1,605	6	0.37	0–1.3	10.5
Hospital blood counts (sentinel group)	14,490	102	0.70	0.15–1.3	—	—	—	—	—
Female									
Genitourinary medicine clinic attenders:									
Heterosexual	18,230	128	0.7	0.39–1.1	15,647	16	0.10	0–0.23	6.9
Injecting drug users attending agencies[3]	131	2	1.5	—	489	2	0.41	—[4]	3.7
Pregnant women at delivery (infant dried blood sports)[5]	103,981	195	0.19	0–0.51	348,442	56	0.02	0–0.10	11.7
Pregnant women seeking terminations	7,298	40	0.55	0–0.78	—	—	—	—	—
Hospital blood counts (sentinel group)	27,059	73	0.27	0.040–0.44	—	—	—	—	—

[1] The range within a category is the lowest and highest prevalence recorded in individual clinics (genitourinary medicine survey), regions (injecting drug users survey), districts (infant dried blood spot survey) or hospitals (termination of pregnancy, antenatal and hospital surveys).
[2] The ratio by which the prevalence of infection in London is greater than the prevalence in England and Wales outside London.
[3] Attending specialist centres for injecting drug users.
[4] Range 0–7.1 per cent. region with highest prevalence had only 14 samples from women.
[5] In Northern and Yorkshire region data for pregnant women come from the antenatal survey.

Macpherson Inquiry

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department of the Macpherson Inquiry recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [80532]

Ms Jowell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 14 April 1999, *Official Report*, columns *239–40*.

The Department has already set up a number of initiatives in the past two years on race equality issues and we are taking stock of these in the light of the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report. In considering the implications of the Inquiry's recommendations, it will be important to develop a systematic response across Government and the Department is working with the Home Office and other Government Departments to take this forward.

Cancer Information

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what Government funding is available for publishing cancer information to *(a)* the public and *(b)* medical professionals; [80274]

(2) what proposals he has to publicise cancer care information on the internet. [80275]

Mr. Hutton: As part of the wider health information strategy, a Cancer Information Strategy is currently being developed which will streamline information sources. Areas for action identified include developing a core cancer information pack for patients, carers and other users; information requirements of primary care; and patient centred information systems. The new National Health Service Information Strategy and the Cancer Information Strategy will support the new NHS in its development of integrated care, in which the focus is on people and their needs rather than institutions.

The overall strategy will take some time to complete and initial work has started to specify the relevant components of the strategy and to identify the cancer information requirements for all user groups and will include a business case to justify the investment in information in relation to the benefits to be achieved. The Cancer Information Strategy Steering Group will be making an interim report in September.

Contraceptive Pills

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to inform the public of the decision by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines on the safety of the third generation contraceptive pill. [81035]

Ms Jowell: An announcement was made to the media on 7 April 1999 giving details of the outcome of the review by the Medicines Commission of "third generation" combined oral contraceptive pills, containing gestodene or desogestrel, and the risk of venous thrombo-embolism. Copies of the announcement have been placed in the Library.

Doctors and other family planning health practitioners were informed about the Medicines Commission via an Epinet message on 7 April. This included an information sheet for them to give to patients. The next edition of the bulletin *Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance*, which will appear on the Medicines Control Agency's web site, will also provide information for doctors and pharmacists.

Patient information leaflets supplied with third generation combined oral contraceptives containing the new advice are expected from mid-year onwards.

Multiple Sclerosis

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will commission research into the mechanisms of central fatigue in multiple sclerosis; [81343]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the impact of clinical psychology in the management of multiple sclerosis. [81344]

Ms Jowell: The Government fund health and medical research in a number of ways.

The Department funds research and development to support its work on policy development and evaluation in health and social care. The Department also manages the National Health Service research and development levy which is used to support research and development of relevance to the National Health Service in hospitals, general practice and other health care settings, and to fund the NHS research and development programme. In addition, the Medical Research Council (MRC)—which receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the science and engineering base.

Priorities for departmental research and development support for the development of policy are determined through discussion with policy colleagues, the Departmental Research Committee and Ministers. In the NHS R&D Programme, priorities take account of widespread consultation with those using, delivering and managing services, within a framework overseen by the Central Research and Development Committee for the NHS. In all cases, priorities for our budgets reflect analysis of the burden of disease, potential benefits, Government priorities and take account of the responsibilities and work of other funders.

Management of much of the research supported by the NHS R&D Levy is devolved and details of expenditure at project level are not collected routinely by the Department.

Project details of work directly funded by the Department or supported through the NHS R&D Levy can be found on the National Research Register (NRR). This is available in the Library and most medical libraries on CD Rom, and on the Internet: http://www.doh.gov.uk/nrr.htm. The NRR also contains many details of projects/trials funded by the MRC and other funders.

Within our programmes of research there is nothing specifically relating to clinical psychology or the mechanism of central fatigue.

The Department is currently considering work to look at care packages for those with multiple sclerosis, and has funded a study entitled "Health and independence through education: a controlled evaluation", which aims to assess the value of education in promoting health and independence for people with progressive neurological disorders such as MS.

We have asked those who manage the priority setting process to ensure that the mechanism of central fatigue in multiple sclerosis is included in consideration of future research priorities.

The Medical Research Council support for research into MS and associated demyelinating diseases was estimated at £640,000 in 1997–98. This work covered both basic and applied research.

In addition, the MRC funds a considerable amount of basic underpinning research in broad related areas such as immunology and cellular medicine.

The MRC always welcomes high quality applications for support into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. In addition, regional offices of the NHS Executive run response mode funding schemes to which applications of relevance to the NHS can be made. Awards are made by both the NHS and the MRC according to the scientific quality and importance of proposals.

Mental Health

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the rates of *(a)* schizophrenia and *(b)* depression among (i) Afro-Carribeans and (ii) the British white population. [81415]

Mr. Hutton: We are aware of research that shows that African-Carribeans are diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia 3 to 6 times more often than the white population. Although the reasons for this are not clear cut, a recent survey published by the Policy Studies Institute showed the annual prevalence of non-affective psychosis was somewhat less than twice as high as the white population. Research also shows that the incidence of depression is probably under diagnosed for those from ethnic minorities. In 1994 the first national psychiatric morbidity survey revealed that about 1 in 7 adults aged 16–64 had suffered some sort of neurotic problem in the week prior to interview. The most frequent disorder was mixed anxiety and depressive disorder (71 per 1000).

Renal Services

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding geographical inequality in renal provision; and what measures he plans to address the problem in the next three years. [81439]

Mr. Hutton: We have received a number of representations and are aware of the variations in provision. We acknowledge the concerns which have been expressed and we are taking steps to address them.

Centrally issued guidance on specialist commissioning and the National Priorities Guidance have both emphasised the need for health authorities and National Health Service trusts to review the existing provision of renal services and to plan for and to commission increased and equitable high-quality provision.

We are planning to issue guidance shortly which will be designed to provide further advice and assistance to health authorities and National Health Service trusts. This guidance will include information from a survey of renal services which is being carried out to ascertain the current position.

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the establishment of a national renal service framework; and if he will make a statement. [81441]

Mr. Hutton: A rolling programme of national service frameworks (NSFs) was launched in April 1998. The first two frameworks being developed are on coronary heart

disease and on mental health; these will be followed by NSFs on older people (spring 2000) and diabetes (spring 2001).

The suggestion that renal services should be the subject of a national service framework was raised by representatives of the National Kidney Federation at their meeting last year with my noble Friend the Baroness Hayman. Since then, an Early Day Motion supporting this proposal has been tabled by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). There have also been twenty-one letters of support from hon. Members to Ministers. There are currently no plans for a national service framework for kidney disease. It is likely, however, that the diabetes NSF will look at some aspects of renal provision as renal failure is a complication of diabetes.

We will continue to work with the professional and voluntary groups concerned to look at ways in which we can develop and improve the provision of services for people with kidney disease.

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the projected increase in the next three years in the number of kidney patients *(a)* nationally, *(b)* regionally and *(c)* in Bexley and Greenwich District; and what steps he intends to take to meet such increases in demand. [81440]

Mr. Hutton: The provision of renal replacement therapy (dialysis and transplantation) for people with end-stage renal failure (ESRF) has increased year on year. From 1993 to 1995 the number of patients in England receiving treatment for ESRF rose by 20 per cent.—nearly 4,000 additional patients.

The projected increase in demand for such services is estimated at 9 per cent. per annum. Though this figure is not broken down by region, it is likely to be higher in areas where there is a high population of elderly people or a high proportion of people from ethnic minorities. A revision of the epidemiological needs assessment (published in 1994) will be issued soon, setting out the current level of need and taking ethnicity into account.

Guidance issued in October 1998 on commissioning arrangements for specialist services identified renal services as a priority, and emphasised the need for health authorities to plan on a long-term basis for the needs of their populations. In addition, a Health Service Circular on renal services will be published in the next few months; this will make clear the need for Health Authorities to review levels of renal services and to plan to meet the expected increase in demand.

Bexley and Greenwich Health Authority is a constituent member of the South East Thames Renal Steering Group. The group has carried out a study into the projected demand for renal services across the south east Thames area. Its work has resulted in the decision to open a satellite renal unit at Greenwich, and a further satellite unit at Lewisham is planned.

Organ Procurement

Mr. Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received advocating the establishment of a transplant commission to review the organ procurement system; and if he will make a statement. [81442]

Mr. Hutton: We have received one representation from the Royal College of Surgeons. A College working party has reviewed the provision of organ transplantation in England and Wales, and in its report has recommended the establishment of a National Transplant Service. We are grateful to the Royal College of Surgeons for the work done by the working party in analysing the problems and producing its report which will be taken into account in the current review of the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority. This review is wide-ranging and will be determining what central support transplant services require, including the issue of organ procurement, and how this is best delivered.

Health Records

Mr. Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the status is of a section 6(b) note in health records. [81492]

Mr. Denham: A note attached to a health record under section 6(2)(b) of the Access to Health Records Act 1990 does not alter anything in the record, but will form part of that survey in the same way as the existing information.

NHS Direct

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of calls to NHS Direct which relate to back pain; and what advice NHS Direct has offered callers. [81609]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available centrally. However, each of the NHS Direct pilot sites will be able to provide relevant information for the area it covers.

Back pain can result from a variety of causes and the advice NHS Direct offers callers reflects clinically recognised best practice relating to the specific cause and symptoms of the back pain.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions his Department has used an emergency control order to respond to instances of food poisoning or contamination in each of the last five years. [81613]

Ms Jowell: I made an Emergency Control Order under Section 13 of the Food Safety Act 1990 on 20 May 1998. This was followed by two Amendment Orders on 20 May 1998 and 10 July 1998 respectively. No other Emergency Control Orders under this section of the Act have been made by Health Ministers in the last 5 years.

Cancer Centres

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the *(a)* designated and *(b)* accredited regional cancer centres, indicating the date of designation and accreditation in each case. [81731]

Mr. Hutton: Early implementation of the Calman/Hine Report reflected the different staring points in regions of the National Health Service and allowed the designation

processes to fit local circumstances. There are currently no rigid criteria for the designation or accreditation of cancer centres. We are in the process of developing a set of common national standards and performance measures against the new performance framework which will apply across the country.

The following is a list of cancer centres by region with the date of designation where available.

South West Region

There are five cancer centres in South and West Region. All were designated in 1996, and redesignated in February 1999.

Avon, Somerset and Wiltshire

Devon and Cornwall (Exeter)

Devon and Cornwall (Plymouth)

Dorset

Three Counties

London

There are five cancer centres in London. All were provisionally designated in 1997.

South East London

South West London

North West London

North Central London

North East London

Trent

Four cancer centres were designated in Trent in 1995

Sheffield Cancer Centre

Nottingham Cancer Centre

Derby Cancer Centre

Leicester Cancer Centre

West Midlands

The West Midland are currently assessing 21 Acute NHS trusts as designated centres for 14 different cancer types

Eastern

Eastern Region have designated networks for the provision of services for up to 10 tumour sites. Designation was given to the following trusts in 1997.

Bedford

Luton and Dunstable

Addenbrooke's

Hinchingbrooke

Papworth

Norfolk and Norwich

James Paget

Peterborough

King's Lynn

Ipswich Hospital

West Suffolk

There are also two cancer centres from the former North Thames Region now located in Eastern Region which were designated in 1998.

Mount Vernon

Southend

Northern and Yorkshire

The four cancer centres in Northern and Yorkshire Region were all designated in 1995.

Hull

Leeds

Newcastle

Teesside

North West

North West Region are in the process of designating their Cancer Centres, Preston, Merseyside and Manchester in 1999–2000.

South East Region

There are five cancer centres in South East Region. Designated in 1996.

Southampton

Portsmouth

Provisionally designated in 1997

Brighton

Kent

Guildford

South East Region now also contains the following cancer networks from the former Oxford and Anglia Region.

Royal Battle and Berkshire

Heatherwood and Wrexham

South Buckinghamshire

Milton Keynes

Stoke Mandeville

Northampton

Kettering

Oxford Radcliffe

Horton General

Radcliffe Infirmary.

Breast Screening

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the working group on breast screening set up by the Chief Medical Officer in October 1998. [81735]

Mr. Hutton: The Chief Medical Officer set up a working group in October 1998 to assess the workforce pressures in the breast screening programme and to identify possible means to address the pressures. The group has now made a report to the Chief Medical Officer who is considering this and the issue of future publication.

NHS Pensions

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the cost to *(a)* the West Suffolk Hospital NHS Trust and *(b)* Suffolk Health Authority of increased employer pension contributions arising from changes in the 1997 and 1998 Budgets to Advanced Corporation Tax. [81673]

Ms Jowell: The withdrawal of Advanced Corporation Tax has had no effect on employer contributions in the National Health Service Pension Scheme. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) by my then right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 July 1997, *Official Report*, column *1*.

MMR

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the take-up rate has been for measles, mumps and rubella vaccination for 1998–99 and the preceding four years in *(a)* Manchester, *(b)* the North West and *(c)* England. [81717]

Ms Jowell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *300*. The figures for 1998–99 will be available towards the end of the year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Public Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the public appointments for which his Department is responsible and which carry a fee or salary, indicating for each type of appointment the fee or salary band which applies. [80748]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 15 April 1999]:* "Public Bodies 1998"—copies of which are available in the Library of the House—provides information on the levels of remuneration paid to those serving on the boards of public bodies for which my Department is responsible. In addition to those, there are the following paid public appointments:

Public appointment	*Number of members*	*Remuneration*
Advisers to the Home Secretary on representations against Exclusion under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1989	3	£215 per diem
Annual Reviewer of the Operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1989	1	£297 per diem
Charity Commissioners	5 (2 full time, 3 part time)	Salaries linked to SCS pay scales
Chief Surveillance Commissioner and Commissioners	1 Chief Commissioner, 6 Commissioners	Salary range: £35,000 to £55,000
Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary	1 Chief Inspector 5 Inspectors	Pay scale for Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabularies linked to Chief Police Officers' pay
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons	1	Salary linked to Senior CMI Service (SCS) pay scales
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation	1	Salary linked to Senior Civil Service (SCS) pay scales
Immigration and Nationality Directorate's Complaints Audit Committee	3	£203 per diem
Independent Assessor of Miscarriage of Justice Compensation	1	£350 per case
Interception of Communications Commissioner	1	£630 per diem
Prisons Ombudsman	1	Salary range: £41,550 to £65,270
Selection Panels for Independent Members of Police Authorities for 41 Provincial Forces	41	Hourly rate determined by individual local authorities
Service Authority for National Criminal Intelligence Service	5	£16 per hour subject to daily and annual maxima
Service Authority of National Crime Squad	5	£16 per hour subject to daily and annual maxima
Youth Justice Board	Chair plus 11 members	Chair £48,000 Members £136 per diem

Immigration Services Tribunal

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the *(a)* costs of setting up and *(b)* annual running costs of the Immigration Services Tribunal and its staff; what provisions have been made to meet such costs; and what plans he has for designated professional bodies to contribute towards these costs. [81403]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Details of the costs of setting up and the annual running costs of the Immigration Services Tribunal and staff are contained in the Regulatory Impact Assessment which was published at the same time as the Immigration and Asylum Bill. Schedule 6, paragraph 5(1) of the Bill enables the Secretary of State to prescribe by order fees for the registration or continued registration of persons on the register. There are no plans for designated professional bodies to contribute to these costs.

Immigration Services Commission

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of fee he plans to be payable by those applying to be registered with the Immigration Services Commission under paragraph 5 of schedule 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Bill; by what criteria the level of the fee will be fixed; and on what basis each scale of fees will be determined. [81404]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: An estimate of level of fee to be paid by those applying to be registered with the Immigration Services Commissioner is contained in the Regulatory Impact Assessment which was published at the same time as the Immigration and Asylum Bill. The criteria for fixing the fee level will be based on the full economic costs of providing the service to those who are required to register and will reflect the level of activity which the Commissioner and his staff devote to them.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the *(a)* start-up costs and *(b)* annual running costs of the office of the Immigration Services Commissioner and staff; and what provisions have been made to meet such costs. [81402]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Details of the estimated start-up and annual costs of the office of the Immigration Services Commissioner and his staff are contained in the Regulatory Impact Assessment which was published at the same time as the Immigration and Asylum Bill. Powers for the Immigration Services Commissioner to require the payment of fees from designated professional bodies and for the Secretary of State to prescribe fees for registration or continued registration are contained in clause 65(7) and schedule 6, paragraph 5(1) of the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

Young Offenders Institutions

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children from each local unitary authority in Wales were in young offenders' institutions in each of the past 10 years. [81333]

Mr. George Howarth: Information on where prisoners originate from is not available. The available statistics, shown in the table, relate to persons who were first committed to custody under sentence by a court from Wales and initially received into a Young Offender Institution in England and Wales.

Receptions [1] of 15–17 year olds into Young Offenders Institutions [2] in England and Wales from a Welsh court by Welsh unitary authority, 1992–98

Unitary authority and Custody type	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Blaenau Gwent							
Untried	—	—	—	1	—	5	16
Convicted unsentenced	—	—	—	1	2	2	2
Sentenced	—	7	—	5	1	—	2
Bridgend							
Untried	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Convicted unsentenced	—	—	—	—	—	1	8
Sentenced	2	6	17	10	4	9	16
Caerphilly							
Sentenced	3	24	22	16	13	17	21
Cardiff							
Sentenced	4	20	32	28	52	69	81
Carmarthenshire							
Sentenced	—	2	7	6	6	11	8
Ceredigion							
Sentenced	—	—	1	1	3	4	1
Conway							
Sentenced	—	1	5	10	5	2	2
Denbighshire							
Sentenced	—	4	2	3	2	2	6
Flintshire							
Sentenced	1	7	3	4	8	8	11
Gwynedd							
Untried	—	—	—	4	—	—	—
Convicted unsentenced	—	—	—	3	—	—	—
Sentenced	3	5	6	10	7	1	5
Isle of Anglessey							
Sentenced	1	1	3	1	5	2	1
Merthyr Tydfil							
Untried	—	—	—	—	—	—	5
Convicted unsentenced	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
Sentenced	—	9	17	21	18	20	27
Neath Port Talbot							
Sentenced	—	—	4	2	1	4	6
Newport							
Sentenced	7	28	33	25	25	23	38
Pembrokeshire							
Sentenced	1	8	3	1	5	3	1
Powys							
Untried	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Sentenced	—	5	3	3	—	—	2
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff							
Untried	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
Convicted unsentenced	—	—	—	—	—	1	7
Sentenced	4	15	23	28	21	21	34
Swansea							
Sentenced	2	23	18	20	23	16	23
Vale of Glamorgan							
Untried	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
Convicted unsentenced	—	—	—	—	1	—	5
Sentenced	2	12	12	7	8	11	22
Wrexham							
Sentenced	—	2	5	2	5	11	9

[1] Total receptions cannot be calculated by adding together receptions in each category because there is double counting.
[2] Includes receptions into closed young offender institutions, open young offender institutions and juvenile prisons.

Probation Service

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* probation officers and *(b)* probation service officers retired, per service, in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [81558]

Mr. George Howarth: The available information is as follows:

Full-time established probation officers retiring each year by area

Number of persons

Probation area	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Avon	2	4	3
Bedfordshire	4	3	1
Berkshire	2	1	8
Cambridgeshire	2	1	5
Cheshire	5	6	—
Cornwall	3	—	—

Full-time established probation officers retiring each year by area

Number of persons

Probation area	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
Cumbria	3	2	4
Derbyshire	7	4	2
Devon	6	8	3
Dorset	4	9	2
Durham	1	2	1
Essex	5	5	3
Gloucestershire	2	3	1
Hampshire	8	9	4
Hereford and Worcester	—	4	1
Hertfordshire	5	3	1
Humberside	4	10	5
Kent	11	4	5
Lancashire	9	7	3
Leicestershire	1	2	1
Lincolnshire	1	1	1
Greater Manchester	6	10	4
Merseyside	14	11	8
Norfolk	3	4	3
Northamptonshire	2	4	2
Northumbria	6	8	1
Nottinghamshire	2	—	—
Oxford and Buckingham	5	8	5
Shropshire	—	2	1
Somerset	2	3	—
Staffordshire	5	11	5
Suffolk	2	2	5
Surrey	3	—	1
East Sussex	1	2	—
West Sussex	1	3	1
Teesside	3	1	3
Warwickshire	4	1	—
West Midlands	24	11	16
Wiltshire	2	6	1
North Yorkshire	2	8	—
South Yorkshire	5	12	3
West Yorkshire	8	8	14
Inner London	16	30	17
North East London	2	—	4
South East London	1	—	2
South West London	1	2	1
Middlesex	11	5	3
Dyfed	—	5	4
Gwent	—	2	—
North Wales	3	2	1
Powys	—	—	3
South Glamorgan	1	1	7
Mid Glamorgan	1	4	—
West Glamorgan	—	2	1
England and Wales	221	256	170

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment takes place by probation officers in preparation for a home detention curfew; and if he will make a statement. [81561]

Mr. George Howarth: The Probation Service contributes to the risk assessment conducted by the prison to establish the suitability of an offender to participate in the Home Detention Curfew (HDC) scheme. Probation staff advise on the suitability of the prisoner and on the proposed curfew address. The Probation Service will consider whether the participation of the offender in the HDC scheme would be likely to present an unacceptable risk to the victim, others living at the proposed address or the public; whether there is a pattern of offending which indicates an unacceptable risk of re-offending during the HDC period; or whether there is a probability of failure to comply with the conditions of the curfew.

Guidance to the Probation Service on HDC is set out in Probation Circulars 44/1998 and 82/1998, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average age of *(a)* probation officers and *(b)* probation service officers in each of the last three years. [81560]

Mr. George Howarth: The Home Office does not collect information on the ages of probation staff on a routine basis. However, a survey was held on 1 November 1998 to collect some limited information on the age structure at that time. The results for the 51 areas that responded are shown in the tables.

Probation officers by age and grade[1,2]
England and Wales 1 November 1998

Number of persons

Grade	*Under 47*	*47–48*	*49–50*	*51–55*	*56–58*	*Over 58*	*All ages*
CPO	10	6	5	21	8	1	51
DCPO	6	3	—	5	—	—	14
ACPO	81	42	31	41	9	1	204
Area manager	19	3	11	6	1	—	40
SPO	447	137	106	193	43	36	961
PO	3,113	490	426	913	216	215	5,373
Temp PO	72	5	5	10	8	32	132

Non-probation officer staff by age and grade[1,2]
England and Wales 1 November 1998

Number of persons

Grade	*Under 47*	*47–48*	*49–50*	*51–55*	*56–58*	*Over 58*	*All ages*
Research officers	61	5	7	8	4	3	88
Probation services' officers	1,051	119	168	366	141	152	1,996
Clerical/secretarial	1,472	215	230	530	180	181	2,807
Administrative	724	82	94	205	69	37	1,211
Other	838	116	113	252	100	222	1,641

[1] Returns were not received from Durham, Hereford and Worcester and Staffordshire
[2] Whole-time equivalents. Figures may not add to the total because of the rounding of part-time hours

Fire Engines

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of fire engines *(a)* in each fire brigade and *(b)* in total, (i) in each of the last three years and (ii) on the last date for which figures are available. [81556]

Mr. George Howarth: The number of pumping appliances in each brigade in England and Wales on 1 January in each of the last three years was:

Number of pumping appliances at stations on 1 January

	1997	*1998*	*1999*
Avon	39	39	39
Bedfordshire and Luton	29	25	25
Buckinghamshire	31	31	31
Cambridgeshire	37	37	33
Cheshire	46	46	45
Cleveland	23	23	23
Cornwall	67	66	66
County Durham and Darlington	28	35	35
Cumbria	54	54	54
Derbyshire	46	45	45
Devon	81	81	81
Dorset	61	59	59
East Sussex	38	38	38
Essex	75	75	75
Gloucestershire	33	33	35
Greater Manchester	73	72	72
Hampshire	95	96	96
Hereford and Worcester	44	43	43
Hertfordshire	43	43	43
Humberside	49	49	49
Isle of Wight	16	16	16
Isles of Scilly	4	3	4
Kent	87	87	87
Lancashire	65	65	66
Leicestershire	33	33	33
Lincolnshire	48	48	48
London	117	177	175
Merseyside	45	43	42
Mid and West Wales	83	83	83
Norfolk	52	52	52
North Wales	74	74	75
North Yorkshire	45	45	45
Northamptonshire	28	28	28
Northumberland	23	25	23
Nottinghamshire	36	36	36
Oxfordshire	36	36	36
Royal Berkshire	25	25	25
Shropshire	38	38	38
Somerset	42	42	42
South Wales	81	87	86
South Yorkshire	31	32	32
Staffordshire	48	48	48
Suffolk	47	47	47
Surrey	41	41	41
Tyne and Wear	34	34	34
Warwickshire	27	27	27
West Midlands	62	62	62
West Sussex	46	46	46
West Yorkshire	67	68	66
Wiltshire	34	34	36
Total	2,467	2,472	2,466
Northern Ireland	111	111	111

Anti-terrorism Measures

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the appropriateness of anti-terrorism measures taken in public places; and if he will make a statement. [81438]

Mr. Straw: The joint Home Office/Northern Ireland Office consultation paper "Legislation Against Terrorism", which was issued on 17 December last year, examined the powers available under existing counter-terrorist legislation, including the measures available for use in public places. The use made of these measures in a particular area is the operational responsibility for the relevant Chief Officer of police.

The consultation paper concluded that the current powers under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1989) allowing the police in Great Britain to stop, question, search and arrest (including at ports) for terrorist purposes should for the most part be retained in the proposed permanent United Kingdom wide counter-terrorist legislation—though with some possible modifications. The paper also flagged up that, depending on the security situation at the time, new counter-terrorist legislation might also need to include additional temporary measures extending only to Northern Ireland. If this were the case, these additional measures would be phased out as soon as the security situation allowed.

The consultation period for the "Legislation Against Terrorism" consultation paper ended on 16 March this year. We are analysing the responses. It is envisaged new counter-terrorist legislation will be introduced when a suitable legislative opportunity arises.

Rape

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the report on the study initiated by his Department into the processing of rape cases by the criminal justice system; and if he will make a statement. [81436]

Mr. Boateng: The report is nearing completion and we hope to publish it in July 1999.

Perjury

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions have been secured for the crime of perjury in the last 12 months. [80378]

Mr. Boateng: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database show that in England and Wales in 1997, (latest available) there were 238 defendants prosecuted for offences of perjury of whom 173 were convicted.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide additional storage space for files being dealt with by the Case Allocation Unit in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [80772]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We intend to transfer some non-active files from storage accommodation in Croydon to Acton. The space made available will meet all the foreseeable needs of the Case Allocation Unit. We expect the exercise to be completed by the end of May.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the throughput of files by the Case Allocation Unit planned for in the new organisation of immigration and asylum caseworking; and what is the throughput achieved according to the most recent figures available. [80773]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No firm projections of throughput of files by the Case Allocation Unit were made.

During the week ending 9 April, the Case Allocation Unit received 2,865 files and despatched 1,338. This was an unusually low throughput due to the Easter holiday period.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the average daily number of *(a)* callers trying to make a call to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, *(b)* calls made to that Directorate and *(c)* calls answered by the Telephone Caller Unit. [80780]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Figures for calls made during normal working hours in February and March are as follows:

(a) Average number of callers per day: 5,240

(b) Average number of calls per day: 47,046

(c) Average number of calls answered per day: 1,690

Note that many calls are repeat calls.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits he and his Ministers have made to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at Croydon in the last year. [80781]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Home Secretary has visited the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) four times during the past year: on 14 September 1998, 18 February 1999 and 23 March 1999. He is planning to visit IND again shortly.

I have visited IND eight times during the last year, on 11 June 1998, 14 September 1998 and on 11 February, 3 March, 11 March, 23 March, 31 March and 13 April 1999.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change in the level of productivity was planned for in the reorganisation of caseworking in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate; and what level of productivity is currently being achieved. [80777]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate's Private Finance Initiative contract with Siemens Business Services measures productivity as reduction in unit costs. The contract with Siemens assumes that unit costs reductions of more than 40 per cent. can be achieved when the new computer system is introduced to support the new modern ways of working. Delivery of the computer system has been delayed and the recent reorganisation of caseworking has been planned on a unit cost reduction of 32 per cent.

A unit cost reduction of 15 per cent. was achieved prior to the recent disruption caused by the business change and modernisation initiative which was also part of the Public Finance Initiative project. Unit costs for the year ending February 1999 had reduced by between 3 per cent. and 4 per cent. Unit costs for February 1999, in which output was badly affected by the disruption, were 28 per cent. higher than pre-contract levels.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the joint team established by the Home Office and Siemens Business Services on 17 March to report. [81467]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Project Team has reported its proposals for addressing the operational recovery of the Integrated Casework Directorate, which have been approved. The project team is continuing its work.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by how much the backlog in the asylum casework of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate has grown *(a)* in the last year and *(b)* in the last three months for which figures are available. [80770]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The estimated number of applications for asylum awaiting an initial decision rose by 20,340 in the 12 months between March 1998 and February 1999 to 71,295. In the three months between December 1998 and February 1999, the figure rose by 10,405.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were planned for the Telephone Caller Unit of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate under the reorganisation of caseworking; and what is the average number of staff currently manning the Telephone Caller Unit. [80778]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Immigration and Nationality Enquiry Bureau deals with both telephone and written inquiries from members of the public and with specialised inquiries from other Government departments and local authorities. The original complement of the unit, which assumed that the full information Technology system would be available, was 64. This was revised to 94 for the period of Team Based Caseworking. There are currently 83 staff in post. The average number of staff manning the telephones each day during March was 40.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many meetings he and Ministers in his Department have held with Siemens plc in connection with the reorganisation of caseworking in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in the last year. [80779]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Home Secretary and I have had four meetings with Siemens plc during the last year.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what date it was planned that *(a)* the Public Caller Unit and *(b)* the Asylum Screening Unit would move from Lunar House to the Whitgift Centre; and when it is now planned that these moves will take place; [80774]

(2) what factors underlay his decision to delay the move of the Public Caller Unit and the Asylum Screening Unit from Lunar House to the Whitgift Centre. [80775]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Public Caller Unit (PCU) commenced its planned phased move to the Whitgift Centre on Monday 1 February and completed the move on Friday 12 February. The Asylum Screening Unit (ASU) was originally scheduled to close in Lunar House on Friday 5 March and open in the Whitgift Centre on Monday 8 March.

During the initial transition phase to the Immigration Casework Directorate, the PCU experienced a large increase in the numbers of callers which continued after the PCU's move to the Whitgift Centre. In order to deal with these increased numbers additional temporary accommodation in Lunar House has been used by the PCU since Wednesday 10 March. Because of this, the planned move of the ASU to the Whitgift Centre was put on hold while the situation was reviewed.

Following the review, it was agreed that additional improved queuing facilities for callers to the PCU and ASU should be provided. Additional staff for the PCU and ASU will also be provided in order to deal with the expected numbers of callers attending these units each day. It is now planned that the ASU will close in Lunar House on Friday 30 April and open in the Whitgift Centre on Tuesday 4 May. The PCU will close its additional accommodation in Lunar House on Friday 28 May.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of when the backlog of asylum casework in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will be cleared. [80768]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government are committed to reducing the Immigration and Nationality Directorate casework backlog to frictional levels by 2001. Our plans for dealing with Immigration and Nationality Directorate casework backlogs are set out int he Government's White Paper, "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum."

Former Yugoslav Nationals

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those persons, including dependants, who entered the United Kingdom under special arrangements for vulnerable individuals from former Yugoslavia *(a)* in September 1992 and *(b)* between November 1992 and August 1995 have subsequently (i) voluntarily left the UK, (ii) remained in the UK and (iii) applied for settlement in the UK. [80776]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I regret that the available statistics do not separately identify these persons from other nationals of the former Yugoslavia and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many representations he has received on the Government's non-ratification of the Optional Protocol of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; [80833]

(2) when the Government intend to ratify the Optional Protocol of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and if he will make a statement. [80832]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are two Optional Protocols to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *756–57*, that the United Kingdom would sign and ratify the Second Optional Protocol relating to the abolition of the death penalty. The Ambassador in New York accordingly signed the Protocol on 31 March and we shall ratify it shortly. The Home Secretary also announced that the Government had concluded that the United Kingdom should not ratify the First Optional Protocol relating to the right of individual petition, but that we would look at this again once the Human Rights Act has been fully implemented.

We have received one parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), nine parliamentary questions from the noble Lord, Lord Lester of Herne Hill and a letter from the Director of Amnesty International relating to the decisions announced on 3 March. We have received no other correspondence from the public or Members of Parliament about the announcement.

Cleveland Police

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up an inquiry into the circumstances of *(a)* the recent departure of the former Deputy Chief Constable of Cleveland Police Force with particular reference to the role of (i) senior management of the Police Force and (ii) the Cleveland Police Authority and *(b)* the former Deputy Chief Constable's subsequent appointment as Deputy Commissioner of the Royal Turks and Caicos Islands police force; and if he will make a statement. [81488]

Mr. Boateng: I do not believe that any useful purpose would be served by setting up a separate inquiry into the retirement of the former Deputy Chief Constable of Cleveland Police. The former Deputy, Mr. Turnbull, exercised his right to retire from Cleveland Police and he retired on 7 March 1999. Mr. Turnbull's appointment as Deputy Commissioner of the Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force is entirely a personal matter between him and that force.

Immigration Act 1971

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average time taken by him to determine an application by a person with limited leave under the Immigration Act 1971 to enter or remain in the United Kingdom for further leave in each of the last five years. [81462]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Excluding asylum-related cases, the average time taken to decide applications for further leave to remain to remain was:

Year	*Days*
1994	43
1995	45
1996	45
1997	46
1998	49

This includes applications decided on the day in the Public Enquiry Offices.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were detained under the authority of an immigration officer under paragraph 16(2) of Schedule 2 of the Immigration Act 1971 in each of the last five years; and how many of such persons were detained for *(a)* more than one week and *(b)* more than one month. [81464]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is only available at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many directions have been given under *(a)* paragraph 8(1)(a) and *(b)* and (b) paragraph 8(1)(c) of Schedule 2 of the Immigration Act 1971 in each of the last five years; [81466]

(2) how many cases he has referred to *(a)* an adjudicator and *(b)* an appeal tribunal under the provisions of section 21 of the Immigration Act 1971; and in how many such cases he has subsequently varied a decision in favour of an appellant. [81468]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were *(a)* charged and *(b)* convicted of offences under section 26(1)(d) and (g) of the Immigration Act 1971 in each of the last five years. [81471]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Data on the number of people charged by offence are not collected centrally.

Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database on the number of convictions by offence is given in the table.

Number of persons convicted at all courts for offences[1] under sections 26(1)(d) and 26(1)(g) of the Immigration Act 1971, England and Wales, 1993–97

	Offence	
	Section 26(1)(d)	Section(1)(g)
1993	3	—
1994	8	—
1995	7	—
1996	5	—
1997	3	—

[1] Principal immigration offence

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons appealed against the destination specified in directions for their removal following refusal of leave to enter under section 17(1)(a) of the Immigration Act 1971 in each of the last five years; and how many of such appeals were allowed. [81473]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information is that, in 1993, two appeals against the destination specified in directions for their removal following refusal of leave to enter under section 17(1)(a) of the Immigration Act 1971 were heard, neither of which were allowed; in 1994, eight were heard, none of which were allowed and in 1996 two were heard with none allowed. No such appeals were heard in 1995 and 1996.

I regret that information on how many appeals in this category were lodged is not centrally recorded and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records.

Asylum Seekers (Vouchers)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the administrative and other costs of local authorities providing support for asylum seekers by way of vouchers; and what assessment he has made of the average cost per voucher in relation to the nominal value of the voucher. [81472]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Although we have had discussions with some local authorities about the voucher schemes they are operating, these schemes have all been individually devised and are usually based around a branch of one of the major supermarket chains. They bear no comparison, therefore, with the commercially administered nationwide scheme which we have proposed and it would, therefore, have been an unmerited use of resources to have conducted detailed research into the administration and costs of these schemes. The Home Office voucher scheme will be subject to competitive tender, which will help to bear down on costs.

Deportation

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recommendations for deportation were made by courts in cases where an offender received *(a)* a community sentence, *(b)* a sentence of less than four years imprisonment and *(c)* four years or more imprisonment in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [81475]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database is given in the table.

Number of persons sentenced at all courts to (a) a community sentence and (b) immediate custody where the court also recommended deportation, England and Wales, 1993–97

	Main disposal		
		Immediate custody by length of sentence:	
	Community Sentence[1]	Less than 4 years	4 years or over
1993	—	8	187
1994	—	9	230
1995	1	31	237
1996	3	14	276
1997	—	17	297

[1] Includes probation order, supervision order, community service order, attendance centre order, combination order and curfew order (since 1995)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many offenders were recommended for deportation by a court following convictions for *(a)* offences involving the possession or supply of illegal drugs or trafficking in drugs, *(b)* offences involving violence and *(c)* sexual offences in the most recent year for which figures are available; [81507]

(2) how many offenders were recommended for deportation by *(a)* a magistrates court and *(b)* a Crown court in the most recent year for which figures are available. [81506]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database is given in the table.

Number of offenders recommended for deportation by the courts by type of court and type of offence, England and Wales, 1997

Type of court/offence	Number
Court for all offences	
Magistrates court	21
Crown Court	306

Number of offenders recommended for deportation by the courts by type of court and type of offence, England and Wales, 1997

Type of court/offence	*Number*
Offences	
Offences in relation to the unlawful *importation* of a controlled drug	182
Offences in relation to the unlawful *exportation* of a controlled drug	2
Production or being concerned in production of a controlled drug	1
Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug	7
Having possession of a controlled drug	3
Having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply	14
Violence against the person offences	12
Robbery	2
Sexual offences	10

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deportation orders have been made against persons as belonging to the family of another under section 3(5) of the Immigration Act 1971 where that other person had been recommended for deportation by a court in each of the last five years. [81474]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Telephone Kiosks (Prostitutes' Cards)

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish his consultation paper on dealing with advertising by prostitutes in public telephone kiosks. [81672]

Mr. Boateng: The Home Office hopes to publish its consultation paper on new measures to tackle the problem of prostitutes' cards in telephone kiosks next month. The consultation paper will look at options for changing the law to enable those who put cards in telephone kiosks to be dealt with more effectively.

Kosovan Refugees

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to use the former RAF base at Sopley to accommodate Kosovan refugees; and if he will make a statement. [81690]

Mr. Straw: None at this stage. The Government's priority remains to ensure that as far as possible, Kosovan refugees receive protection in the region so that they can return easily to their homes when it is safe for them to do so. However, I announced on 20 April that we have agreed to a request from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to accept a group of vulnerable refugees, mainly women and children, from Macedonia.

Reception centres will be staffed by the Refugee Council and will provide temporary accommodation for refugees prior to their moving into more permanent accommodation. The Refugee Council is liaising closely with local authorities through the Local Government Association. They are currently looking at accommodation throughout the United Kingdom that could be used for reception centres.

Variation of Leave Applications

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has carried out regarding the rights of appeal of a person with limited leave applying for a variation of leave; and what representations he has received on this subject. [81465]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Consultation Paper on the Review of Appeals contained details of our proposals regarding rights of appeal for persons with limited leave applying for a variation of leave. We received no comments on these specific points in the responses to the Consultation Paper.

Asylum Applications (Waterloo)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals claimed asylum at Waterloo Station in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* the first two months of 1998 and *(c)* 1998. [81463]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In 1997, 2,235 applications for asylum were lodged at Waterloo Station. In 1998, 2,820 were made at the same port, of which 210 were made in January 1998 and 205 in February 1998.

Immigration (Written Undertakings)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many written undertakings in respect of support for persons entering the UK were signed in 1997–98; [81469]

(2) how many persons in respect of whom a written undertaking had been given by another accepting responsibility for their maintenance and accommodation applied for asylum in the UK in each of the last five years. [81470]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is not available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Kennedy Report

6. **Ms Osborne:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress he is making towards the implementation of the Kennedy report. [80347]

Mr. Nick Brown: I announced on 26 March that new arrangements along the lines recommended by Professor Kennedy are expected to be in operation by April 2001. We also plan to launch a pilot scheme or schemes by April 2000.

CAP Reform

10. **Ms Keeble:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the impact which reform of the CAP will have on the consumer. [80352]

Mr. Nick Brown: CAP reform should result in significant savings for consumers, of the order of £1 billion a year in aggregate when all the changes have

worked through. The average family of four will save £65 per year provided the likely reductions in market prices are passed to retail.

25. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the reform of the common agricultural policy in connection with farmers' incomes. [80368]

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the effect on farmers of the CAP reform package agreed at the Berlin summit. [80369]

Mr. Morley: The reform package will increase the market orientation of European agriculture and assist producers in their efforts to improve the competitive position of their businesses. In the short term, before these adjustments take place, there may be a negative impact on aggregate incomes of the order of 5 per cent. But in the particularly hard pressed beef sector, incomes have been fully protected.

27. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact of the final outcome of the negotiations on reform of the common agricultural policy on the competitiveness of UK dairy farming. [80370]

Mr. Morley: The competitiveness of UK dairy farming will depend on the ability of producers to adjust to the new market situation. However, the agreement preserved the milk quota system and as long as this remains UK dairy farmers will be prevented from competing freely on world markets.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Agenda 2000 CAP Reform consultation exercise. [82167]

Mr. Nick Brown: I have today sent to interested organisations an information document entitled "CAP Reform Agreement" which summarises the outcome of the negotiations on the CAP reform package of Agenda 2000. It also includes an economic note on the likely effect of the reforms upon producers, taxpayers and consumers, and a summary of responses to the consultation exercise received to date. A further consultation will be undertaken on the implementation of the agreed CAP reform measures when detailed regulations and details of available Community funds are known.

I have also made available today two consultation documents which stem from the agreement on CAP reform on which early preparatory action is necessary. The first, "Rural Development Regulation: Consultation on Implementation in England", seeks views on mechanisms for drawing up and operating seven year rural development plans. We will be asking for comments on who should prepare plans, on the geographic areas they should cover and on who should operate them.

The second, "Supporting the Hill Farmer", seeks views on how we should support farming in the Less Favoured Areas in future. Since the Agenda 2000 reforms have changed the basis on which LFA support can be provided, we will be replacing our Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances scheme. We hope this consultation document will stimulate a wide debate on how we should design a new and better framework of support for our hill farmers.

I shall be placing copies of these documents in the Library of the House today.

Pig Industry

11. **Mrs. Brinton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the state of the pig industry. [80353]

Mr. Morley: Market prices for pigs have improved since the turn of the year, but remain below costs of production. The Government will continue to do all they can to help, while recognising that pigs are traded in a relatively free market with limited opportunity for direct Government involvement.

Fishing Industry Charges

12. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish tables on levels of charges faced by the fishing industry in the United Kingdom relative to the European fishing industries. [80354]

Mr. Morley: We do not have the necessary information about the level or nature of charges to the fishing industries of other Member States to enable us to make the comparisons requested.

Food Standards Agency

13. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will waive the proposed Food Standards Agency fee for food shops of less than 1,000 sq ft retail area. [80355]

Mr. Rooker: We are still considering the large response we have received on our proposals and will not reach any final decisions on the scope or operation of the levy until we have completed our assessment.

15. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the Food Standards Agency to be fully operational. [80358]

Mr. Rooker: The timetable depends on when the necessary legislation can be completed. We would hope the Agency to be established in the first half of next year.

Krebs Trial Areas

14. **Mrs. Organ:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress of the survey in the Krebs trial areas in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. [80357]

Mr. Rooker: Surveying has been completed. The area to be proactively culled will be randomly chosen very soon, and we shall be ready to cull after the end of the closed season.

Food Safety (EU)

16. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about food safety regulations in other parts of the EU. [80359]

Mr. Rooker: Food safety is an area of EU competence. Most food law is harmonised across the EU and rules equivalent to those in place in the UK apply in other Member States. The Government see this as the best way to promote common food safety standards across the EU.

Genetically Modified Foods

18. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about Government health studies into genetically modified foods. [80361]

Mr. Rooker: All genetically modified (GM) foods are subject to a full and rigorous safety assessment before they are approved for sale. To underpin this process, the Department has a research programme with a current budget of £1 million per annum.

21. **Mr. Grieve:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the environmental implications of genetically modified food. [80364]

Mr. Rooker: The environmental implications of genetically modified foods are considered in accordance with the provisions of the EC Directive for the Deliberate Release into the Environment of Genetically Modified Organisms (90/220/EEC).

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what safeguards are in place to ensure that consumers have adequate information on genetically modified foods. [80350]

Mr. Rooker: EC Regulation 1139/98, which came into force on 1 September 1998, requires all foods containing genetically modified (GM) ingredients produced from GM soya and maize to be labelled. This sets a precedent for the labelling of all future GM novel foods.

Genetically Modified Crops

19. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about scope for cross-pollination of genetically modified crops. [80362]

Mr. Morley: We believe the best way to avoid problems arising from cross-pollination is for extra care to be taken when these crops are grown on the farm. We are encouraging the industry to draw up voluntary guidelines including separation distances between GM and other crops. Non-compliance with the separation distances would lead to withholding of GM seed by the supplier.

Lowland Farmers

20. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the regulatory costs incurred by lowland farmers in England. [80363]

Mr. Morley: Costs incurred by individual farms will vary. Our aim is to keep regulatory costs to the minimum necessary to safeguard public, plant and animal health, the environment and the public funds.

Fishing Industry

22. **Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last held discussions with representatives of the fishing industry. [80365]

Mr. Morley: I last met the major representative bodies in the fishing industry on 24 March, prior to the 30 March Fisheries Council in Brussels.

Bovine Tuberculosis

23. **Ms Lawrence:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures have been taken to combat TB in cattle. [80366]

Mr. Rooker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 911.

Milk Marque

24. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has recently received from dairy farms regarding the position of Milk Marque. [80367]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Minister receives regular representations from dairy farmers about a range of issues affecting dairy farming, including the position of Milk Marque.

Meat and Bone Meal

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the regulations governing the disposal of meat and bone meal. [80360]

Mr. Rooker: The disposal of waste MBM is controlled under Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to ensure protection of the environment and human health. The Environment Agency is responsible for the enforcement of these controls and we are confident of their effectiveness.

Bumblebees

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect on horticulture of the decline in the numbers of bumblebees. [80617]

Mr. Rooker: No formal assessment has been made but I have no evidence to suggest that growers face any difficulties. As my hon. Friend will know, bumblebees are widely used for the pollination of protected crops, particularly glasshouse tomatoes.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Access to Justice Bill

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what equal opportunities impact assessment under the Government guidelines set out in Policy Appraisal for Equal Treatment has been made of the Access to Justice Bill; if he will publish the assessment; and if he will make a statement. [81555]

Mr. Hoon: The Government guidelines were issued only after the reform proposals had been settled and the White Paper published. To undertake a single impact assessment of the Access to Justice Bill as a whole would be impracticable because the Bill establishes broad frameworks within which detailed policies will be developed and implemented. We believe a more practicable way forward is to conduct assessments, where appropriate, as individual policies are developed and implemented. This will not only provide more focused assessments, but ensure they occur nearer in time to implementation.

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for this year's appointments to Queen's Counsel *(a)* the average and *(b)* the highest number of unsuccessful previous applications made by applicants. [81481]

Mr. Hoon: The average number of unsuccessful previous applications made by applicants for Queen's Counsel in 1999 was 3.7. The highest number of unsuccessful previous applications by an applicant for Queen's Counsel in 1999 was 26.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department for this year's appointments to Queen's Counsel *(a)* what was the total number of applications, *(b)* what was the number of successful applicants and *(c)* of *(a)* and (b), how many were (i) women, (ii) from ethnic minorities, (iii) below the age of 38 years, (iv) over the age of 50 years and (v) solicitors. [81482]

Mr. Hoon: For this year's silk round the figures were as follows:

Total number of applications: 553

Number of successful applicants: 69

Number of successful female silk applicants: 9

Number of successful ethnic minority applicants: 5

Number of successful applicants below the age of 38: 1

Number of successful applicants above the age of 50: 3

Number of successful solicitor applicants: 1.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for this year's appointments to Queen's Counsel *(a)* the highest figure and *(b)* the average figure given as the gross fee income (i) by successful applicants for Queen's Counsel, (ii) by unsuccessful applicants for Queen's Counsel and (iii) by all applicants for Queen's Counsel. [81483]

Mr. Hoon: The highest and average figure given as the gross fee income (i) by successful applicants for Queen's Counsel, (ii) by unsuccessful applicants for Queen's Counsel and (iii) by all applicants for Queen's counsel for this year's silk round were as follows:

£

	Highest	*Average*
Successful	550,000	224,304
Unsuccessful	790,000	165,897
All	790,000	173,184

Rights of Audience

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about future rights of audience in the higher courts of *(a)* members of the Crown Prosecution Service, *(b)* the proposed Community Legal Service and *(c)* the proposed Criminal Defence Service. [81571]

Mr. Hoon: The Government will seek to amend the Access to Justice Bill to ensure that full rights of audience in the higher courts are exercisable by lawyers employed by the Crown Prosecution Service, the Community Legal Service and the Criminal Defence Service, subject to individual lawyers satisfying the qualification requirements and rules of conduct of the appropriate authorised body. The Government will seek to reinstate clauses defeated in the House of Lords which provided rights of audience in the higher courts for employed advocates, and enabled the Legal Services Commission to provide criminal defence services through its own employees. They will also seek to amend Clause 33 to provide rights of audience to employees of bodies established and maintained by the Legal Services Commission.

Duty Solicitor Schemes

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the value for money of duty solicitor schemes. [81568]

Mr. Hoon: We are constantly reviewing the cost effectiveness of provision of all criminal defence services to ensure that they provide the best possible value for money in terms of quality and price. In addition to assessing all claims from suppliers for duty solicitor services before payment, the level of standby payments is adjusted so that payments relate as closely as possible to the amount of business undertaken by the duty solicitor. From next year all criminal advice and assistance, including the duty solicitor schemes, will be provided under contract. New arrangements for providing duty solicitor services at early first hearings in the magistrates' courts are being tested in a pilot scheme. These arrangements have been monitored and are currently being evaluated.

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for the future of existing duty solicitor schemes; and what steps he intends to take to ensure the continuation of 24-hour cover for criminal defendants. [81567]

Mr. Hoon: It is our intention to continue to provide advice and assistance in broadly the categories for which it is currently available. These categories include advice and assistance provided by duty solicitors at police stations and magistrates' courts. Regulations will make express provision under the Access to Justice legislation.

Census Returns

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the hon. Members with whom, since 1 October 1998, the Lord Chancellor's Department or the Public Record

Office have corresponded concerning public access to the 1921, 1951 and 1961 census returns, indicating the contents of the correspondence. [81557]

Mr. Hoon: Since 1 October 1998, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Public Record Office have corresponded with the following hon. Members concerning public access to the 1921, 1951 and 1961 census returns: the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). In each case the hon. Member was forwarding one or two letters from constituents. There was a total of eight letters from constituents.

The constituents' letters asked when the current instruments prescribing 10 year extended retention periods for the census returns for 1921, 1951 and 1961 were next due for renewal. They also asked whether confirmation could be given that the census returns were not at present closed to public inspection for 100 years under the provisions of Lord Chancellor's Instrument 12 of 1966. The replies stated that the Lord Chancellor's Instruments were due for renewal as follows: 1921 census in 2006, 1961 census in 2001 and 1951 census in 2006. The replies also stated that these census returns were closed to public inspection for 100 years by Lord Chancellor's Instrument 12 of 1966.

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department where the grounds for a 100-year closure period for decennial census returns are set out. [81562]

Mr. Hoon: The grounds for a 100-year closure period for decennial census returns are set out in the White Paper "Open Government" of 1993 (Cm 2290). This assigned a 100-year closure period for decennial census returns on the grounds that they consist of documents supplied in confidence, the disclosure of which would constitute a breach of good faith.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how each of the nine measurements of performance for the new deal for young people is calculated. [81692]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The majority of the nine Core Performance Measures will be calculated using data from the Employment Service, Research and Development Division's New Deal Evaluation Database. We have issued already some initial figures for the first measure showing the numbers of participants who joined the New Deal in April 1998 moving into subsidised and unsubsidised jobs. Methods of calculation for the remaining Core Performance Measures are still being refined.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the final month of the intensified gateway of the new deal for 18 to 24-year-olds will involve. [81694]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Proposals for more intensive activity in the final month of the Gateway are currently being considered. Action is likely to include a proactive review at the end of the third month of the Gateway, coaching, and an increased emphasis on referrals to jobs and places on the Options before the end of the Gateway period.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will give details of the strategy being developed to improve the new deal for young people. [81691]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Continuous improvement in the New Deal is a key priority, allowing us to build upon the excellent progress that has been made so far in helping young people into jobs. To further improve the New Deal, a wide ranging strategy has been developed. Key elements include the Core Performance Measures which will monitor performance at a local level and achieve improvement through partnership action plans and the Innovation Fund—worth £5 million to back local innovative projects with scope to improve performance. The Government have indicated that they will particularly welcome bids against the Innovation Fund to intensify and enhance the New Deal Gateway and to improve the performance of New Deal in meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged young people.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 18 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 757, on Employment Service staff, how many of the young people taken on by the Employment Service from the New Deal are *(a)* subsidised and *(b)* unsubsidised; at what cost; and how many are involved in New Deal support functions. [81641]

Mr. Andrew Smith: A total of 342 people have been recruited into the Employment Service under the Government's New Deal programme between April 1998 when the programme commenced and 31 March 1999. Of these recruits the employer subsidy has been claimed for 286, the remaining 56 are unsubsidised. The total cost of the subsidy claimed for the period to 31 march 1999 is £322,875.

The large majority of ES's recruits under New Deal are employed in local offices where they are employed in an administrative capacity. This is a multifunctioning role which will involve them in a range of Jobcentre activities. A proportion of their time may therefore be spent on administrative work supporting the ES's New Deal functions.

LEA Funding

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by local education authority the funds received per pupil from all the initiatives launched and managed by his Department since May 1997, listing separately funds received from *(a)* standards fund initiatives and *(b)* other initiatives including capital funds. [80691]

Ms Estelle Morris: The funding per pupil for all education initiatives announced by the Department of Education and Employment since May 1997 is listed for each local education authority in the following table. The figures for the Standards Fund do not include those Grants

for Education Support and Training announced prior to May 1997 but paid in the 1997–98 financial year. Grant maintained school pupils are included in the Standards Fund from April 1999. The Standards Fund figures include contributions from local education authorities. The per pupil figures in the table represent an average for each local education authority across all phases and types of school. The initiatives have not been disaggregated to take account of the particular types of school or pupil that they are aimed at. The amount per pupil for Standards Fund will depend on several local factors, such as the level of grant successfully bid for and accepted by a local education authority. Grants other than Standards Fund grants include nursery education grant paid in respect of children attending private, voluntary and independent providers of nursery education within the relevant local education authority area. However, these children are not included in the pupil count used to derive the per pupil figures in column *(b)*.

Funding per pupil for Department of Education and Employment initiatives announced since May 1997

£

Local education authority	*(a) Standards fund*	*(b) Other including capital*
City of London	1,310	222
Camden	403	209
Greenwich	291	195
Hackney	446	257
Hammersmith	322	239
Islington	373	191
Kensington and Chelsea	368	236
Lambeth	418	373
Lewisham	276	289
Southwark	292	218
Tower Hamlets	447	202
Wandsworth	336	267
Westminster	385	196
Barking	278	126
Barnet	201	186
Bexley	159	195
Brent	269	277
Bromley	169	307
Croydon	215	311
Ealing	243	174
Enfield	204	175
Haringey	339	203
Harrow	188	166
Havering	150	148
Hillingdon	204	396
Hounslow	247	204
Kingston upon Thames	193	467
Merton	202	322
Newham	228	233
Redbridge	204	178
Richmond upon Thames	170	255
Sutton	166	282
Waltham Forest	271	181
Birmingham	238	150
Coventry	261	144
Dudley	266	146
Sandwell	201	214
Solihull	167	260
Walsall	242	228
Wolverhampton	294	211
Knowsley	254	187
Liverpool	203	170
St. Helens	182	200
Sefton	183	134
Wirral	168	168
Bolton	213	232

Funding per pupil for Department of Education and Employment initiatives announced since May 1997

£

Local education authority	*(a) Standards fund*	*(b) Other including capital*
Bury	177	266
Manchester	290	179
Oldham	239	247
Rochdale	233	244
Salford	197	240
Stockport	210	229
Tameside	188	258
Trafford	194	281
Wigan	198	215
Barnsley	219	233
Doncaster	180	152
Rotherham	199	187
Sheffield	220	227
Bradford	271	237
Calderdale	227	252
Kirklees	264	196
Leeds	186	177
Wakefield	209	203
Gateshead	215	122
Newcastle upon Tyne	241	363
North Tyneside	235	164
South Tyneside	224	228
Sunderland	174	124
Isles of Scilly	980	284
Bath and North East Somerset	187	221
City of Bristol	238	137
North Somerset	184	234
South Gloucestershire	192	235
Hartlepool	210	180
Middlesbrough	233	241
Redcar and Cleveland	221	171
Stockton-on-Tees	188	177
Kingston-upon-Hull	198	190
East Riding of Yorkshire	189	200
North East Lincolnshire	195	261
North Lincolnshire	195	270
North Yorkshire	188	166
York	224	203
Bedfordshire	208	217
Luton	266	206
Buckinghamshire	228	194
Milton Keynes	218	229
Derbyshire	184	236
Derby	251	305
Dorset	182	236
Poole	184	264
Bournemouth	199	338
Durham	232	161
Darlington	225	179
East Sussex	189	211
Brighton and Hove	231	230
Hampshire	161	209
Portsmouth	201	180
Southampton	194	145
Leicestershire	181	145
Leicester	244	244
Rutland	319	687
Staffordshire	186	179
Stoke-on-Trent	224	255
Wiltshire	207	272
Swindon	202	284
Bracknell Forest[1]	179	165
Windsor and Maidenhead[1]	201	116
Newbury[1]	223	132
Reading[1]	268	284
Slough[1]	309	191
Wokingham[1]	175	177
Cambridgeshire	198	203

Funding per pupil for Department of Education and Employment initiatives announced since May 1997

£

Local education authority	(a) Standards fund	(b) Other including capital
Peterborough[1]		151
Cheshire	176	177
Halton[3]	193	116
Warrington[3]	183	163
Devon	202	213
Plymouth[4]	193	160
Torbay[4]	164	153
Essex	189	242
Southend-on-Sea[5]	162	170
Thurrock[5]	219	135
Herefordshire[6]	210	213
Worcestershire[6]	185	167
Kent	206	195
Medway Towns[7]	192	130
Lancashire	213	195
Blackburn with Darwen[7]	321	157
Blackpool[7]	197	148
Nottinghamshire	159	204
Nottingham City[8]	288	111
Shropshire	205	222
Wrekin, The[9]	279	147
Cornwall	206	102
Cumbria	235	129
Gloucestershire	217	292
Hertfordshire	192	188
Isle of Wight	224	214
Lincolnshire	204	177
Norfolk	204	196
Northamptonshire	210	180
Northumberland	188	213
Oxfordshire	216	184

Funding per pupil for Department of Education and Employment initiatives announced since May 1997 -

£

Local education authority	(a) Standards fund	(b) Other including capital
Somerset	217	214
Suffolk	166	159
Surrey	190	207
Warwickshire	204	180
West Sussex	177	177
Berkshire[10]	3	30

[1] Part of Berkshire until 31 March 1998
[2] Part of Cambridgeshire until 31 March 1998
[3] Part of Cheshire until 31 March 1998
[4] Part of Devon until 31 March 1998
[5] Part of Essex until 31 March 1998
[6] Within Hereford and Worcester until 31 March 1998
[7] Part of Lancashire until 31 March 1998
[8] Part of Nottinghamshire until 31 March 1998
[9] Part of Shropshire until 31 March 1998
[10] Ceased to be a Local Authority on 1 April 1998

LEAs (Competitive Bidding)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many bids *(a)* have been received and *(b)* were successful in each local education authority for each competitive bidding process launched and managed by his Department since November 1998. [80692]

Ms Estelle Morris: Details of the number of competitive bids submitted by local education authorities since November 1998, along with the number that were successful, is given in the following table.

Competitive bids received from local education authorities since November 1998

	Local recruitment measures		Summer literacy schools		Literacy at Key Stage 3		Numeracy at Key Stage 3		Summer numeracy schools	
DfEE Initiative	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*
Local education authority										
City of London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Camden	1	1	5	5	0	0	0	0	3	2
Greenwich	1	1	11	8	0	0	0	0	9	4
Hackney	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	2
Hammersmith	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
Islington	1	1	9	7	1	1	1	0	9	1
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	0	1	1
Lambeth	1	1	10	8	1	1	1	0	10	2
Lewisham	1	1	9	8	0	0	0	0	2	2
Southwark	1	1	4	4	1	1	1	0	3	3
Tower Hamlets	1	1	8	8	0	0	1	0	1	1
Wandsworth	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1
Westminster	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	1
Barking	1	1	8	8	1	1	1	1	8	4
Barnet	0	0	3	3	1	1	0	0	3	2
Bexley	1	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	2	2
Brent	0	0	10	8	0	0	0	0	6	3
Bromley	1	1	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	1
Croydon	1	0	10	8	0	0	1	0	9	3
Ealing	1	1	13	9	1	1	1	1	6	4
Enfield	0	0	4	4	0	0	1	0	1	1
Haringey	1	1	10	8	0	0	1	0	1	1
Harrow	1	1	4	4	0	0	0	0	2	1
Havering	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hillingdon	1	1	5	5	0	0	1	0	3	2
Hounslow	1	1	5	5	0	0	0	0	3	1
Kingston upon Thames	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	1

Competitive bids received from local education authorities since November 1998

	Local recruitment measures		*Summer literacy schools*		*Literacy at Key Stage 3*		*Numeracy at Key Stage 3*		*Summer numeracy schools*	
DfEE Initiative	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*
Merton	1	0	4	4	0	0	1	0	1	1
Newham	1	1	14	8	1	1	1	0	5	3
Redbridge	0	0	0		0	0	1	0	2	2
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	6	6	0	0	1	0	3	3
Sutton	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Waltham Forest	1	1	12	8	0	0	0	0	8	3
Birmingham	1	1	20	11	1	1	1	1	16	5
Coventry	0	0	7	7	1	1	1	0	2	2
Dudley	0	0	0		0	0	1	0	0	0
Sandwell	1	0	7	7	0	0	1	0	4	4
Solihull	1	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	3	3
Knowsley	0	0	11	7	0	0	1	0	11	3
Liverpool	0	0	10	8	0	0	1	0	1	1
St. Helens	0	0	8	8	0	0	0	0	4	3
Sefton	0	0	5	5	0	0	1	0	2	1
Wirral	0	0	4	4	1	1	1	0	3	3
Bolton	0	0	8	8	0	0	0	0	3	2
Bury	0	0	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manchester	1	1	15	11	1	1	1	0	5	1
Oldham	0	0	8	8	0	0	1	0	6	2
Rochdale	0	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	2	2
Salford	0	0	8	8	0	0	1	0	1	1
Stockport	0	0	14	9	1	1	1	0	5	3
Tameside	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	2	2
Trafford	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	1
Wigan	0	0	11	8	0	0	1	0	8	2
Barnsley	0	0	14	9	0	0	1	0	14	5
Doncaster	0	0	10	8	0	0	1	0	4	3
Rotherham	0	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheffield	1	1	10	8	1	1	1	0	5	4
Bradford	1	1	10	8	0	0	1	0	3	2
Calderdale	1	1	4	4	0	0	1	1	3	3
Kirklees	0	0	13	7	0	0	1	0	5	2
Leeds	0	0	16	11	0	0	1	1	4	3
Wakefield	0	0	18	11	1	1	0	0	18	2
Gateshead	0	0	10	8	0	0	1	0	3	3
Newcastle upon Tyne	0	0	9	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Tyneside	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Tyneside	0	0	4	4	1	1	0	0	2	2
Sunderland	0	0	8	8	0	0	1	0	4	3
Isles of Scilly	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bath and North East Somerset	0	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	3	2
City of Bristol	1	1	12	8	1	1	1	0	7	3
North Somerset	0	0	8	8	1	1	1	0	7	4
South Gloucestershire	0	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	2	2
Hartlepool	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	3	3
Middlesbrough	0	0	4	4	0	0	1	0	6	3
Redcar and Cleveland	1	1	4	4	0	0	0	0	1	1
Stockton-on-Tees	0	0	4	4	0	0	1	0	6	2
Kingston-upon-Hull	0	0	8	8	0	0	1	0	4	3
North Lincolnshire	1	0	4	4	1	1	1	1	4	2
North Yorkshire	1	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	2	1
York	0	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	1	1
Bedfordshire	0	0	4	4	0	0	1	1	2	2
Luton	1	1	6	6	0	0	0	0	4	3
Buckinghamshire	1	1	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Milton Keynes	1	1	7	7	0	0	0	0	3	3
Derbyshire	1	1	12	8	1	1	1	0	6	2
Derby	1	1	4	4	0	0	1	0	3	2
Dorset	1	1	10	8	0	0	1	1	2	2
Poole	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	0	1	1

Competitive bids received from local education authorities since November 1998

DfEE Initiative	Local recruitment measures		Summer literacy schools		Literacy at Key Stage 3		Numeracy at Key Stage 3		Summer numeracy schools	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Bournemouth	0	0	7	7	0	0	1	0	7	2
Durham	0	0	10	8	1	1	1	0	5	4
Darlington	0	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	1	1
East Sussex	1	1	8	8	0	0	1	0	4	2
Brighton and Hove	0	0	10	8	1	1	1	0	2	2
Hampshire	0	0	15	11	0	0	0	0	2	2
Portsmouth	0	0	9	8	0	0	0	0	3	3
Southampton	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leicestershire	0	0	5	5	0	0	1	0	2	2
Leicester	1	1	4	4	0	0	1	0	4	2
Rutland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	1	0	15	11	0	0	1	0	9	2
Stoke-on-Trent	1	1	10	8	0	0	1	0	8	2
Wiltshire	'1	'1	10	8	0	0	1	0	2	2
Swindon	'1	'1	7	7	0	0	1	0	3	2
Bracknell Forest	'1	'1	3	3	0	0	0	0	1	1
Windsor and Maidenhead	'1	'1	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newbury	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	0	2	2
Reading	1	1	6	6	0	0	0	0	2	2
Slough	1	1	7	7	0	0	1	0	4	2
Wokingham	'1	'1	2	2	0	0	1	0	1	1
Cambridgeshire	1	1	20	12	0	0	0	0	8	2
Peterborough	1	1	6	6	0	0	1	1	3	2
Cheshire	1	1	10	8	0	0	0	0	10	3
Halton	0	0	5	5	0	0	1	0	4	2
Warrington	0	0	7	7	0	0	1	0	3	3
Devon	'1	'1	13	9	0	0	1	0	3	2
Plymouth	'1	1	10	8	0	0	1	0	6	2
Southend-on-Sea	1	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	2	2
Thurrock	'1	'1	9	8	0	0	0	0	3	3
Herefordshire	0	0	2	2	1	1	0	0	2	2
Worcestershire	0	0	5	5	0	0	1	0	5	1
Kent	1	1	29	12	0	0	1	1	22	2
Medway Towns	1	1	8	8	0	0	1	1	4	1
Lancashire	1	1	19	11	1	1	1	1	9	3
Blackburn with Darwen	1	1	9	8	0	0	1	0	9	4
Blackpool	0	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	2	1
Nottinghamshire	0	0	10	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nottingham City	1	1	14	9	1	1	0	0	3	3
Shropshire	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	0	2	2
The Wrekin	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	0	2	2
Cornwall	'1	'1	10	8	0	0	0	0	9	3
Cumbria	0	0	6	6	0	0	0	0	4	2
Gloucestershire	'1	'1	8	8	0	0	1	0	3	2
Hertfordshire	1	1	14	9	1	1	1	1	10	5
Isle of Wight	'1	'1	5	5	0	0	1	1	0	0
Lincolnshire	0	0	20	11	0	0	1	0	1	1
Norfolk	1	1	8	8	0	0	1	0	6	4
Northamptonshire	0	0	10	8	0	0	1	0	5	3
Northumberland	0	0	4	4	0	0	1	0	2	2
Oxfordshire	'1	'1	5	5	0	0	0	0	3	2
Somerset	'1	'1	9	9	0	0	1	0	2	2
Suffolk	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	3	2
Surrey	1	1	16	11	0	0	1	0	6	4
Warwickshire	1	0	10	8	0	0	1	1	4	3
West Sussex	1	1	6	6	1	1	1	0	3	3
Total	79	70	1,096	900	26	26	94	16	568	303

Competitive bids received from local education authorities since November 1998

DfEE Initiative	*Family numeracy*		*Special educational needs*		*Work related learning*		*Social inclusion—pupil support*		*National grid for learning*	
	A	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*
Local education authority										
City of London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Camden	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Greenwich	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hackney	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hammersmith	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Islington	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kensington and Chelsea	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Lambeth	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Lewisham	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Southwark	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Tower Hamlets	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Wandsworth	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Westminster	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Barking	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Barnet	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Bexley	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Brent	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bromley	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Croydon	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Ealing	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Enfield	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Haringey	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Harrow	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Havering	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Hillingdon	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hounslow	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kingston upon Thames	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Merton	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Newham	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Redbridge	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Richmond upon Thames	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sutton	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Waltham Forest	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Birmingham	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Coventry	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Dudley	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Sandwell	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Solihull	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Knowsley	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Liverpool	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
St. Helens	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Sefton	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Wirral	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Bolton	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bury	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Manchester	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Oldham	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Rochdale	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Salford	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Stockport	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Tameside	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Trafford	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Wigan	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Barnsley	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Doncaster	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Rotherham	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Sheffield	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bradford	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Calderdale	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Kirklees	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Leeds	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Wakefield	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Gateshead	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
North Tyneside	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
South Tyneside	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Sunderland	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Bath and North East Somerset	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1

Competitive bids received from local education authorities since November 1998

DfEE Initiative	*Family numeracy*		*Special educational needs*		*Work related learning*		*Social inclusion—pupil support*		*National grid for learning*	
	A	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*
City of Bristol	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
North Somerset	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
South Gloucestershire	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hartlepool	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Middlesbrough	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Redcar and Cleveland	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Stockton-on-Tees	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Kingston-upon-Hull	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
North Lincolnshire	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
North Yorkshire	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
York	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bedfordshire	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Luton	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Buckinghamshire	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Milton Keynes	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Derbyshire	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Derby	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Dorset	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Poole	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Bournemouth	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Durham	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Darlington	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
East Sussex	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Brighton and Hove	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hampshire	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Portsmouth	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Southampton	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Leicestershire	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Leicester	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Rutland	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Staffordshire	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Stoke-on-Trent	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Wiltshire	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Swindon	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Bracknell Forest	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Windsor and Maidenhead	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Newbury	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Reading	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Slough	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Wokingham	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Peterborough	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cheshire	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Halton	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Warrington	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Devon	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Plymouth	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Southend-on-Sea	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Thurrock	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Herefordshire	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Worcestershire	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Kent	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Medway Towns	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Lancashire	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Blackburn with Darwen	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Blackpool	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Nottinghamshire	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Nottingham City	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Shropshire	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
The Wrekin	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Cornwall	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Cumbria	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Gloucestershire	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Hertfordshire	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Isle of Wight	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Lincolnshire	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Norfolk	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Northamptonshire	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Northumberland	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Oxfordshire	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Somerset	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Competitive bids received from local education authorities since November 1998

DfEE Initiative	Family numeracy		Special educational needs		Work related learning		Social inclusion—pupil support		National grid for learning	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Suffolk	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Surrey	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Warwickshire	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
West Sussex	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	130	51	148	62	148	62	148	134	150	150

Competitive bids received from local education authorities since November 1998

DfEE Initiative	Education of travellers and displaced persons		Expanding local authority music services		New Deal for schools Phase 3		Total	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Local education authority								
City of London	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Camden	1	1	1	1	36	4	52	16
Greenwich	1	1	1	1	28	7	56	26
Hackney	1	1	1	1	43	6	54	16
Hammersmith	1	1	1	1	34	2	44	9
Islington	0	0	1	1	27	4	54	19
Kensington and Chelsea	1	1	1	1	13	0	25	8
Lambeth	1	1	1	1	41	0	70	18
Lewisham	1	1	1	1	18	2	37	18
Southwark	1	1	1	1	38	3	54	16
Tower Hamlets	1	1	1	1	18	5	36	20
Wandsworth	0	0	1	1	7	1	17	10
Westminster	0	0	1	1	39	4	49	12
Barking	1	1	1	1	101	3	127	24
Barnet	1	1	1	1	17	1	31	11
Bexley	1	1	1	0	63	8	76	16
Brent	1	1	1	1	28	3	51	21
Bromley	1	1	0	0	35	15	46	23
Croydon	1	1	1	1	49	7	77	23
Ealing	1	1	1	1	17	3	46	24
Enfield	1	1	1	1	28	3	40	12
Haringey	1	1	1	0	53	4	73	17
Harrow	1	1	1	0	25	5	38	14
Havering	1	1	1	1	66	6	75	12
Hillingdon	1	1	1	1	35	5	52	19
Hounslow	1	1	1	0	139	12	155	24
Kingston upon Thames	1	1	1	1	56	1	67	11
Merton	0	0	1	1	15	2	28	10
Newham	1	1	1	1	28	3	57	23
Redbridge	1	1	1	1	43	11	53	16
Richmond upon Thames	1	1	1	1	18	11	35	26
Sutton	1	1	1	1	68	15	78	21
Waltham Forest	1	1	1	1	12	13	40	30
Birmingham	0	0	1	1	24	18	69	43
Coventry	0	0	1	1	54	23	71	37
Dudley	0	0	1	1	33	1	40	3
Sandwell	0	0	1	0	60	13	79	26
Solihull	1	1	1	1	115	52	129	62
Knowsley	0	0	1	1	9	3	38	17
Liverpool	0	0	1	0	14	3	32	15
St. Helens	1	1	0	0	5	1	23	16
Sefton	1	1	1	0	186	1	201	11
Wirral	0	0	1	0	34	7	49	18
Bolton	1	1	1	1	18	2	36	19
Bury	1	1	1	1	43	19	58	32
Manchester	1	1	1	0	35	5	65	25
Oldham	1	1	1	1	36	1	58	17
Rochdale	1	1	1	1	15	5	27	15
Salford	1	1	1	0	27	5	43	17
Stockport	0	0	1	1	20	7	47	24
Tameside	1	1	1	0	21	4	33	15
Trafford	1	1	0	0	22	4	32	12
Wigan	1	1	1	0	16	3	43	18
Barnsley	1	1	1	1	22	3	58	23
Doncaster	1	1	1	0	26	6	48	22
Rotherham	1	1	1	1	18	0	30	10

Competitive bids received from local education authorities since November 1998

DfEE Initiative	Education of travellers and displaced persons		Expanding local authority music services		New Deal for schools Phase 3		Total	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Sheffield	1	1	0	0	16	3	40	23
Bradford	1	1	0	0	37	1	58	15
Calderdale	0	0	0	0	19	1	33	12
Kirklees	1	1	1	0	40	16	65	28
Leeds	1	1	1	0	37	14	65	34
Wakefield	1	1	1	0	17	3	61	20
Gateshead	1	1	0	0	20	8	40	24
Newcastle upon Tyne	1	1	0	0	9	1	24	12
North Tyneside	1	1	1	1	63	18	73	27
South Tyneside	0	0	0	0	19	4	31	13
Sunderland	1	1	1	1	32	0	52	15
Isles of Scilly	0	0	1	0	3	0	6	2
Bath and North East Somerset	0	0	1	0	41	8	54	16
City of Bristol	0	0	1	0	46	10	74	16
North Somerset	0	0	0	0	7	2	28	19
South Gloucestershire	1	1	1	1	17	3	31	16
Hartlepool	0	0	1	1	11	1	22	12
Middlesbrough	1	1	1	1	18	5	36	17
Redcar and Cleveland	0	0	1	1	22	1	34	11
Stockton-on-Tees	0	0	1	1	29	10	46	21
Kingston-upon-Hull	0	0	0	0	32	6	50	21
North Lincolnshire	0	0	1	1	46	16	63	29
North Yorkshire	1	1	1	0	58	2	73	11
York	0	0	1	0	22	2	35	13
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	0	9	3	23	15
Luton	1	1	0	0	30	3	47	17
Buckinghamshire	1	1	1	1	134	3	145	12
Milton Keynes	1	1	1	1	18	5	36	21
Derbyshire	0	0	1	1	16	8	43	24
Derby	1	1	1	1	39	3	55	14
Dorset	1	1	1	1	29	3	50	18
Poole	1	1	1	1	11	2	23	11
Bournemouth	0	0	1	1	19	2	40	16
Durham	1	1	1	0	28	25	52	42
Darlington	0	0	1	0	32	7	42	12
East Sussex	1	1	1	0	4		25	17
Brighton and Hove	0	0	1	0	27	7	47	23
Hampshire	1	1	1	1	126	17	149	34
Portsmouth	0	0	1	1	75	1	93	17
Southampton	0	0	1	1	59	2	67	7
Leicestershire	1	1	1	0	90	11	104	20
Leicester	0	0	1	0	33	5	49	14
Rutland	0	0	1	1	36	0	41	3
Staffordshire	0	0	1	0	130	41	162	56
Stoke-on-Trent	0	0	1	0	11	3	37	18
Wiltshire	1	1	0	0	41	5	61	21
Swindon	0	0	1	1	11	2	29	17
Bracknell Forest	0	0	0	0	12	2	22	11
Windsor and Maidenhead	0	0	0	0	21	3	30	8
Newbury	0	0	1	0	16	3	28	12
Reading	0	0	1	0	14	4	29	17
Slough	0	0	1	1	30	4	49	19
Wokingham	1	1	1	0	41	17	53	23
Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	0	92	2	128	23
Peterborough	0	0	1	0	77	5	94	20
Cheshire	1	1	0	0	37	8	64	23
Halton	0	0	1	0	21	1	37	10
Warrington	0	0	1	1	128	23	145	36
Devon	1	1	1	1	39	18	64	37
Plymouth	0	0	0	0	12	4	35	17
Southend-on-Sea	0	0	1	1	46	16	58	24
Thurrock	1	1	1	1	21	6	41	23
Herefordshire	0	0	1	0	53	3	64	13
Worcestershire	0	0	1	1	80	11	97	20
Kent	1	1	1	1	49	11	109	21
Medway Towns	0	0	1	0	34	10	54	26
Lancashire	1	1	1	1	36	11	74	33
Blackburn with Darwen	0	0	1	1	35	1	61	20
Blackpool	0	0	0	0	200	11	212	10
Nottinghamshire	1	1	1	1	36	10	53	23
Nottingham City	0	0	1	1	68	4	93	24

Competitive bids received from local education authorities since November 1998

	Education of travellers and displaced persons		*Expanding local authority music services*		*New Deal for schools Phase 3*		*Total*	
DfEE Initiative	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*	*A*	*B*
Shropshire	0	0	1	0	52	9	64	18
The Wrekin	0	0	0	0	31	1	42	10
Cornwall	1	1	1	1	54	23	81	39
Cumbria	1	1	1	1	29	14	46	28
Gloucestershire	1	1	1	1	44	3	64	21
Hertfordshire	1	1	1	1	46	5	80	26
Isle of Wight	0	0	1	0	12	4	25	12
Lincolnshire	1	1	0	0	45	15	73	30
Norfolk	1	1	1	1	46	4	69	22
Northamptonshire	1	1	1	0	77	18	100	33
Northumberland	1	1	0	0	45	13	58	24
Oxfordshire	1	1	1	0	55	14	71	26
Somerset	1	1	1	0	24	11	44	28
Suffolk	1	1	1	1	24	19	34	25
Surrey	1	1	1	0	82	28	113	47
Warwickshire	0	0	1	0	16	[1] 1	38	15
West Sussex	1	1	1	0	41	19	60	36
Total	91	91	127	80	5,909	1,053	8,714	2,998

[1] LEA bids submitted as part of a consortium

Note:

Column A = Number of bids received, Column B=Number of successful bids

Final number of approved bids to be determined following further discussions with the LEA

Classroom Tuition

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate the average number of hours a Year 7 pupil in a local education authority school spent receiving tuition in the classroom in *(a)* 1978–79, *(b)* 1988–89 and *(c)* 1998–99. [81715]

Ms Estelle Morris: I am unable to provide my hon. Friend with an estimate of the average number of hours a Year 7 pupil spent receiving tuition in the classroom as the data is not available for the years specified. However, Circular 7/90 recommends minimum levels of time that pupils are taught in schools which for Years 7 to 11 pupils is 24 hours per week.

WALES

Mental Health Services

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he has given to Welsh health authorities regarding mental health treatment for members of (i) black and (ii) other ethnic minority communities. [80196]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: When issuing advice to the health sector on mental health issues the Welsh Office is providing either a legally binding direction; action that requires a specific response; information or guidance or examples of good practice. These categories are equally applicable across mental health service users irrespective of cultural or ethnic background.

We are aware of the issues around mental health and ethnicity and shall consider the needs of ethnic minority patients when drawing up our plans for future Strategies on both child and adolescent and adult mental health services.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

CAP Reform

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the consequences of CAP reform in Wales for the *(a)* beef, *(b)* sheepmeat and *(c)* dairy sectors. [80847]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Department has been undertaking research into the potential effects of the Agenda 2000 reforms. It appears, from the preliminary analysis, that the beef sector should benefit, as increased subsidies and decreased feed costs (a consequence of the reform of the cereals regime) are expected to outweigh price reductions.

There are no specific reforms for the sheepmeat sector. However, the sector will benefit from the decreased price of feedstuffs. On the other hand, reductions in the price of beef will increase competitive pressures and are expected to lead to a cut in market prices for sheepmeat. This will be offset by increased Sheep Annual Premium payments. It is unclear at the moment what the net effect will be.

Dairy sector reforms will not be implemented until 2005.

These estimates are taken from work in progress and do not make allowances for restructuring or for movements in exchange rates.

Atypical Anti-psychotic Drugs

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the efficacy of new atypical anti-psychotic drugs in the treatment of mental health. [81382]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: All products that have been licensed will have had their efficacy assessed by the Medicines Control Agency.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet mental health groups to discuss the prescribing of atypical anti-psychotic drugs for mental health patients. [81381]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I am always willing to consider specific requests for meetings with mental health groups.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice he has given to health authorities regarding the prescribing of atypical anti-psychotic drugs for mental health patients. [81380]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: WHIN No. (98)13 issued on 1 December 1998 and WHN No. (99)1 issued on 7 January 1999 both related to the withdrawal of the product Serdolect (sertindole). I shall place a copy of these notices in the Library of the House as soon as possible.

Capping

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to use his capping powers for 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [82136]

Mr. Michael: In line with our Manifesto commitment to abolish crude and universal capping, I decided not to announce capping limits in advance for 1999–2000. This left councils and police authorities in Wales to make up their own minds on their budgets taking account of their local circumstances, including the impact on council tax, and the views of local people.

The average Band D council tax bill in Wales has increased by 8.5 per cent. or £47 to £602. Overall, the reaction to the 1999–2000 local government revenue settlement has been measured and responsible. I have therefore decided not to cap any authorities this year.

The National Assembly for Wales will inherit my present capping powers in respect of 2000–01 and later years, although it is planned to replace these powers with the new reserve powers to limit council tax and precepts which are contained in the Local Government Bill.

Authorities in Wales should bear in mind that the Assembly will be able to look back at increases in budgets since 1998–99 in deciding whether and how to use the new reserve powers in future years.

Cadw

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what targets he has set for Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments Executive Agency. [82137]

Mr. Michael: Cadw has been set the following key targets for 1999–2000:

1. To complete 90 per cent. of the approved conservation maintenance programme.
2. To complete 80 resurveys.
3. To resolve 75 per cent. of ad hoc listing cases within 17 weeks.
4. To complete 120 scheduling actions, of which at least 90 per cent. involve additional protection.
5. To resolve 80 per cent. of listed building consent cases within 4 weeks and 90 per cent. of cases in 7 weeks.
6. To resolve 75 per cent. of scheduled monument consent cases within 13 weeks and 90 per cent. of cases within 17 weeks.
7. To resolve 80 per cent. of historic buildings grant applications in 18 weeks.
8. To resolve 80 per cent. of ancient monument grant applications within 6 weeks.
9. To pay 90 per cent. of properly presented claims for historic buildings and ancient monuments grants within 5 weeks of receipt.
10. To achieve a market share of 63 per cent. of the number of visitors to the top twenty heritage sites in Wales.
11. To reduce direct net cost per visitor at Cadw's sites to an average of 25 pence.
12. To operate within allocated programme and running cost budgets.
13. To achieve efficiency gains of at least 2 per cent.

Full details of Cadw's performance against targets for 1999–2000 will be published in the Agency's Annual Report.

Lobbyists

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans *(a)* he and *(b)* Welsh Office Ministers have to attend (i) meetings and (ii) functions with lobbyists and public relations organisations between 6 and 20 May. [81734]

Mr. Michael: None.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 23 April 1999

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Freemasons (CPS)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 2, on membership of the freemasons within the CPS, what was the total number of lawyers invited to declare their masonic status; and if he will break down the total between *(a)* masons, *(b)* non-masons, *(c)* those who refused to indicate their status and *(d)* those from whom no reply was received. [81794]

The Attorney-General: Disclosure forms were sent in September last year to 2,097 lawyers. Nine declared that they are freemasons (although two of these declared themselves to be lapsed members); 1,096 declared that they are not freemasons; 133 declined to make a declaration; and 859 did not return the form.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she intends to publish Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's Sixth Annual Report as Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres. [82305]

Marjorie Mowlam: I have today arranged for copies of Sir Louis Blom-Cooper's Annual Report for 1998 to be placed in the Library.

I welcome the Report and am glad to note that, again, the Commissioners have found nothing untoward in the care and treatment of detainees held in the custody of uniformed officers of the RUC.

The Government and the Chief Constable of the RUC look forward to the day when the Holding Centres are no longer needed; I keep the position under regular review, in conjunction with the Chief Constable.

Meantime, I have reappointed Sir Louis and Dr. Bill Norris as Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner respectively. The reappointments will run from 1 April 1999 nominally until 30 September 2000, subject to review.

I am grateful to Sir Louis and Bill Norris for their work. I shall study their recommendations carefully and respond as soon as possible.

Pre-school Places (Disabled Children)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what priority will be given to children with disability in the allocation of pre-school places. [81417]

Mr. McFall: Under new admissions arrangements which are being introduced from September 1999 as part of our Pre-School Education Expansion Programme, my Department has encouraged schools to continue the traditional practice of allocating nursery places for children with special needs, including disability, in each session within their approved pre-school enrolment number. In addition, children with Statements of Special Educational Needs can be admitted to nursery schools and classes over and above the school's pre-school enrolment number, based on the advice of Education and Library Boards.

Liver Disease

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children has a gastroenterology service to care for patients with liver disease. [81497]

Mr. McFall: The Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children does not presently provide a gastroenterology service but the position is under review. However, a visiting outpatient (outreach) service is available at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children by a team based at Birmingham Children's Hospital. Gastroenterology clinics are held monthly and liver clinics held quarterly.

Biliary Atresia

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of biliary atresia have been identified in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. [81496]

Mr. McFall: The number of deaths and discharges from hospitals in Northern Ireland where the primary diagnosis was congenital biliary atresia during the last five years are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Deaths and discharges from hospitals in Northern Ireland where the primary diagnosis was congenital biliary atresia

Year	*Number of deaths and discharges*
1997–98	2
1996–97	8
1995–96	18
1994–95	19
1993–94	10

Source:
Hospital Inpatients System

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Kasai operations have been carried out by the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children on babies suffering from biliary atresia each year for each of the last five years; how many such procedures have been successful; and how many children on whom the procedure has been used are alive with their own livers. [81495]

Mr. McFall: One kasai operation was performed in each of the years 1994, 1995 and 1996 with three operations carried out in 1997 and two in 1998. All eight children who have had kasai operations are alive. Two of these children have subsequently had liver transplants and a third is on the transplant waiting list. Six of the eight children are currently alive with their own livers.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Kosovar Albanians

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money the Government have made available to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for emergency relief to the Kosovar Albanians. [81903]

Clare Short: Between April 1998 and March 1999, the Government allocated £1.5 million to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for emergency relief in Kosovo and the region. In recent weeks, we have focused on providing practical assistance to UNHCR to strengthen its in-country capacity and facilitate the movement of relief supplies into the region. Since 30 March, we have provided UNHCR with 22 airlifts to Skopje and Tirana for relief goods and personnel, and a convoy of five trucks and drivers has arrived in Tirana to support their relief operations in Albania. At UNHCR's request, we have sent specialist personnel and equipment to Tirana airport to help handle the relief flights, and we are providing a similar package for Skopje. We have also offered to provide public information and security specialists to support UNHCR's operations in the region.

Refugee Fund Supplies (Macedonia)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the food supplied to the Albanian refugees in Macedonia is purchased within Macedonia; and what plans she has to enable the proportion to be increased. [81924]

Clare Short: Our policy is to support the procurement of local goods and services where this is possible, cost effective, and when it would not harm the local economy or reduce access of the local host population to essential supplies. Detailed information about food purchases by international agencies in Macedonia is not currently available.

SCOTLAND

Fishing

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is his estimate of the value of each salmon taken by an angler visiting Scotland to the Scottish economy in each of the last 10 years; [81220]

(2) what is his estimate of the value of salmon angling to the economy of Scotland in each of the last 10 years; and of this how much in each year represents spending by visitors from outside Scotland. [81221]

Mr. Macdonald: Information on the amount spent by visiting anglers is not held centrally. However, a survey published in 1991 by Portsmouth Polytechnic's Centre for Marine Resource Economics estimated that the net economic value of rod fisheries in Scotland lay within the range of £198 million to £300 million, with a best estimate of £225 million. The "Scottish Salmon Strategy Task Force" report, published in 1997, uprated these figures to produce an estimate for 1995 values of a range from £270 million to £430 million, with a best estimate of £350 million.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* salmon and grilse and *(b)* sea trout eaten per seal in Scottish waters in each of the last 10 years. [81218]

Mr. Macdonald: Recent studies in the rivers Dee and Don suggest that common seals may eat several hundred salmonids per annum. However, extrapolation from these observations to calculate consumption per seal over the last 10 years is difficult as consumption rates and composition are likely to have changed.

Studies on the impact of seals on salmonid stocks are ongoing in the rivers Tay and Conon.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Seals

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the minimum number of *(a)* grey seals and *(b)* common seals required to maintain a viable population in Scottish waters. [81216]

Mr. Macdonald: The minimum number required to maintain a viable population will vary according to a range of factors. Advice in 1998 from the Natural Environment Council's Special Committee on seals indicated that there is evidence that the rate of increase in pup production in some grey seal colonies has been slowing down, although it is too early to predict equilibrium sizes. Common seal populations have recovered from the viral outbreak in the 80s which reduced numbers dramatically, but are nevertheless more dependent upon changes in local prey abundance than grey seals.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

CABINET OFFICE

Teenage Pregnancies

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he expects to publish the Social Exclusion Unit report into teenage pregnancies. [81968]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister plans to publish the report shortly.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of ways in which the biotechnology industry could use less exacting regulatory systems elsewhere in the EU in order to gain legal rights

within the UK for *(a)* field trials *(b)* commercial growing and *(c)* produce distribution in respect of genetically modified crops. [81076]

Mr. Meacher: The regulatory control of the release and marketing of GMOs is governed throughout the EC by Directive 90/220/EEC. This has been transposed into UK law through Part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992, as amended 1995 and 1997. All Member States are required to implement the Directive fully.

The Committee of Competent Authorities for the Directive meets regularly to exchange information on implementation with a view to securing even application of the Directive throughout the EC. Therefore the regulatory systems in all EU member states should operate to similar standards.

All consents for GMO releases for the purposes of research, such as field trials, are issued at national level. For any field trial to be carried out in the UK, a consent must be issued by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

The commercial growing and distribution of GM produce require specific consents to be issued at the Community level under Directive 90/220/EEC. All Member States participate and can raise objections in this decision-making process. Once an approval has been issued, it may be used throughout the Community, provided any specific conditions on use or on types of environment and geographical areas for release are complied with.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish *(a)* an updated version of Table 1 of Appendix 4 of the report of the European Communities Committee of the House of Lords of Session 1997–98 (HL 11-I p57–8) concerning the regulation of genetic modifications in agriculture, stating in addition, in respect of each application, the policy of Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* a similar list of applications considered by (i) the EU Commission and (ii) a Council Committee, which were disapproved. [73721]

Mr. Meacher: An updated version of the table is available on my Department's website. The volume of information requested is such that I will send my hon. Friend a copy of the table that includes the additional information requested.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the occasions in *(a)* the Regulatory Committee of the European Commission and *(b)* the Council of Ministers when approval for genetically modified crops for (1) experimental and (2) commercial purposes was granted; when the representatives of the United Kingdom (A) expressed disapproval of any such application and (B) (i) voted against and (ii) abstained, on any occasion when approval for that application has been obtained by qualified majority of opinion, together with the nature and origin of the application concerned. [73722]

Mr. Meacher: Approvals for experimental releases of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are determined nationally.

To date, only one application to place GMOs on the market has been given approval where the UK authority objected. The case, under Part C of Directive 90/220/EEC, concerned a genetically modified maize modified for insect resistance and herbicide tolerance. The UK had no objection to the marketing of this product for seed production but voted against its unrestricted use as proposed by the Commission. Full details are contained in the table referred to in my reply to my hon. Friend given today.

A30 (Woodleigh Junction)

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when work will commence on the A30 Woodleigh Junction. [81967]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Subject to the successful completion of the remaining statutory procedures, work on the A30 Woodleigh Junction Improvement could start early next year.

Road Building

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many road building schemes using the design, build, finance and operate contracting method are currently *(a)* completed and *(b)* under construction; what is the estimated cost to public funds for each project over the life time of the DBFO contract; and if he will make a statement. [81897]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Eight DBFO contracts encompassing 11 trunk road schemes have been awarded and 10 of the schemes are now open to traffic. The A30 Honiton-Exeter Improvement scheme which forms part of the A30/A35 Exeter to Bere Regis project is still under construction.

The estimated cost of each project over the lifetime of the contract is represented by the Net Present Value (NPV) range of the shadow tolls. The actual payments are dependent on traffic volumes on the road. The published details are as follows:

£ million

Project	*NPV range*
M1-A1	186 to 281
A419/A417	106 to 124
A69	58 to 66
A19	125 to 149
A30/A35	129 to 158
A50	58 to 72
M40	155 to 210
A1(M)	138 to 165

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which chairpersons, chief executives and board members of the regional development agencies have since 1979 *(a)* had a political affiliation with a party, and which one, *(b)* donated more than £1,000 to a political party, and to which one, *(c)* donated more than £1,000 to persons in a political party, and to whom, and *(d)* have confirmed that (i) they and (ii) the companies they represent have had no off-shore funds; and if he will make a statement. [81922]

Mr. Caborn: Political allegiance played a part in the appointment process only in the case of the local authority members on the Boards of the regional development agencies (RDAs). The table provides details.

Donations made to a political party or to persons in a political party are a personal matter for the individual. The Chairmen, Board Members and Chief Executives of the RDAs have not been asked to declare any such donations.

RDA Members are required to declare and register an interest in an off-shore fund only if that interest is relevant to their Board responsibilities. No such declarations of interest have been made.

(a) RDA Board Members who are local authority councillors

Region	*Council*	*Political affiliation*
Eastern RDA		
Sal Brinton	Cambridgeshire County Council	Liberal Democrat
Peter Martin	Essex County Council	Conservative
Chris Mole	Suffolk County Council	Labour
Jacqueline Russell	Welwyn and Hatfield District Council	Labour
East Midlands RDA		
Ted Cassidy	Leicester City Council	Labour
Graham Chapman	Nottingham City Council	Labour
Martin Doughty	Derbyshire County Council	Labour
Gillian Gardiner	Leicestershire County Council	Liberal Democrat
North East RDA		
Philip Hughes	Teesdale District Council	Independent
John McCormack	Wansbeck District Council	Labour
Rita Stringfellow	North Tyneside Council	Labour
John Williams	Darlington Borough Council	Labour
North West RDA		
Mike Doyle	St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	Labour
Richard Leese	Manchester City Council	Labour
Kath Reade	Burnley Borough Council	Labour
Dr. Fred Ridley	Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council	Liberal Democrat
South East RDA		
Ken Bodfish	Brighton and Hove Council	Labour
Winifred Oliver	Mole Valley District Council	Conservative
David Rogers	East Sussex County Council	Liberal Democrat
Kevin Wilson	Milton Keynes Council	Labour
South West RDA		
Doris Ansari	Cornwall County Council	Liberal Democrat
Peter Chalke	Wiltshire County Council	Conservative
Tudor Evans	Plymouth City Council	Labour
Helen Holland	Bristol City Council	Labour
West Midlands RDA		
Michael Bird	Walsall Council	Conservative
Albert Bore	Birmingham City Council	Labour
David Sparks	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	Labour
Susan Davis	Telford and Wrekin District Council	Labour

(a) RDA Board Members who are local authority councillors

Region	*Council*	*Political affiliation*
Yorkshire and Humber RDA		
Muriel Barker	North East Lincolnshire Council	Labour
Stephen Houghton	Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	Labour
Michael Johnston	Harrogate Council	Liberal Democrat
Pamela Warhurst	Calderdale Council	Labour

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Atlantic Frontier

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport from whom he received advice concerning the possible inclusion of the Atlantic Frontier on the list of World Heritage sites to be put forward to UNESCO; what the advice was; and what the reasons were for not including the Atlantic Frontier in his list. [81618]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The responsibility for considering this suggestion rested with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. My right hon. Friend was advised by Scottish Natural Heritage that the data presented by Greenpeace were weak, particularly in respect of cetaceans, where the distribution claimed tended simply to reflect recording effort. The UK continental shelf proposal will be reconsidered when the tentative list is reviewed in five years' time.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantities of plutonium contaminated wastes were *(a)* stored and *(b)* disposed of at (i) Sellafield and (ii) Dounray in each of the last three years. [81498]

Mr. Battle: These are matters for BNFL and the UKAEA respectively, and I have asked the chairman of each organisation to write to my hon. Friend with the information he requires and to place a copy of his reply in the Library of the House.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what notice is given to other states of the shipment from the United Kingdom of cargoes of *(a)* high-level radioactive waste, *(b)* plutonium and *(c)* MOX nuclear fuel. [81945]

Mr. Battle: We are not required to give any notice of such shipments. To date, there have been no shipments by sea from the UK of High Level Waste. However, in the case of shipments by sea of High Level Waste from France to Japan undertaken by BNFL as transport operator, it has been our practice since 1996 routinely to inform coastal states, both on and off route, in advance and on a confidential basis. We intend to continue with this practice in the case of the forthcoming sea shipment of MOX fuel from Sellafield, consistent with our international obligations to protect information about the movement of sensitive nuclear materials. As far as I am

aware, there have been no shipments of civil separated plutonium by sea from the United Kingdom since the late 1970s. Shipments by air from the United Kingdom of nuclear materials are carried out fully in accordance with our obligations under national and international aviation regulations.

Genetically Modified Foods

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* the Minister for Science have held to discuss genetically modified foods. [70439]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 February 1999]:* Neither I nor my noble Friend the Minister for Science have held any meetings specifically to discuss genetically modified food policy.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the preparedness of the insurance industry to provide the relevant professional indemnity insurance to consultants employed on millennium compliance projects. [80056]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

None. It is for insurers themselves to decide whether they are prepared to offer cover.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 18 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *793*, how many times Ministers in his Department met their counterparts in the US Administration between 1 January 1998 and 1 June 1998, indicating the dates and locations of each meeting, the Ministers involved and the name of the US counterpart. [80829]

Mr. Timms: None.

Professional Statisticians

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff who have worked as professional statisticians in his Department and its predecessors have left on early retirement in each of the past 10 years. [81177]

Mr. Timms: One statistician from this Department has taken early retirement in the last nine years. Information is available only going back nine years.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff by grade are employed as professional statisticians in his Department; how many of these staff have been accepted as fast stream by the Civil Service Selection Board; and how many have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society. [81199]

Mr. Timms: Statistical work is undertaken by a range of specialists such as Research Officers, Social Survey Officers and Economists. Within this Department, there are three Senior Civil Servants, one Grade 6, 16 Grade 7s, and 16 Assistant Statisticians employed as "professional" Statisticians, all of whom have been recruited via Civil Service Selection Board. In addition, our Department employs seven Statistical Officers.

Our records do not show which of the Departmental statisticians have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society.

Note:

These figures do not include any staff who are not in post for example on career breaks or secondments.

Performance-related Pay

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Benefits Agency staff have their pay linked to performance in respect of (i) benefit clearance times, (ii) benefit accuracy, (iii) weekly benefit savings from detected fraud and (iv) any performance measurements. [81695]

Mr. Timms: The administration of the Benefits Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Peter Mathison. I have asked him to write to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Frank Field, dated 22 April 1999:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many Benefits Agency staff has their pay linked to performance in respect of (i) benefit clearance times, (ii) benefit accuracy, (iii) weekly benefit savings from detected fraud and (iv) any performance measurements.

Under the current Benefits Agency Performance Pay Scheme a proportion of an officers pay is determined by their annual performance appraisal rating. Appraisal ratings are determined by two factors:

success in meeting up to six key work objectives and

the demonstration of a number of competencies, for example communication skills reasoning and intellect, and resource management.

Each year, key work objectives are agreed by an officer and their line manager. Benefit clearance times, benefit accuracy, weekly benefit savings from detected fraud, and other performance measures, may appear within one or more of the key work objectives.

Unfortunately specific information of the numbers of staff who have one or more of these measures included in their key work objectives is only available at disproportionate cost.

I am sorry that, on this occasion, I could not be of more help.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of prosecutions were successful *(a)* of all prosecutions for benefit fraud, *(b)* of prosecutions for benefit fraud under the Theft Acts and *(c)* of prosecutions for benefit fraud under the Social Security Acts, in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–99. [81698]

Mr. Timms: Benefits Agency operational matters are the responsibility of the Chief Executive, Peter Mathison, I have asked him to reply to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Frank Field, dated 22 April 1999:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking what proportion of prosecutions were successful (a) of all prosecutions for benefit fraud, (b) of prosecutions for benefit fraud under the Theft Acts and (c) of prosecutions for benefit fraud under the Social Security Acts, in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98 and (iii) 1998–99.

The attached table, Table 1, provides the requested information for prosecutions successfully concluded by the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (BFIS) and the Benefit Agency Security and Investigation Service (BASIS) in England and Wales.

An average of 5–10% of cases brought to court are withdrawn, acquitted, dismissed or found not applicable. This accounts for the number of successful prosecutions being less than 100%. BASIS prosecutes under various Acts in addition to the two referred to above, for example the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act.

I am unable to give you the information in the format requested for Scotland as the Procurator Fiscal is not obliged to provide information to the Agency about the legislation under which charges are brought or what those charges were. I have therefore given you the overall percentage of successful prosecutions by BFIS in Scotland. This is shown in Table 2.

The Benefit Agency Security Investigation Service, in Scotland, was successful in prosecuting 100% of the cases submitted to the Procurator Fiscal in 1997/8. Figures available for 1998/9 indicate that BASIS in Scotland submitted and had accepted for prosecution 90 cases of which 25 have already been successfully concluded.

I hope you find this helpful.

Table 1: Percentage of successful prosecutions by the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (BFIS) and the Benefit Agency Security and Investigation Service (BASIS) in England and Wales

percentage

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Sec 112 Social Security Administration Act	95	94	91
Theft Act	90	92	94
BASIS (serious fraud)	90	84	82
Total (BFIS & BASIS)	94	94	91

Source:
BA Security Implementation & Support and BFIS

Table 2: Percentage of prosecutions for Fraud by the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (BFIS) in Scotland

percentage

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
All BFIS cases	99	99	98

Source:
BFIS

Attendance and Disability Living Allowances

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will change the Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance rules which apply when someone is admitted to hospital. [82306]

Mr. Bayley: We propose to change the rules for Attendance Allowance (AA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) so that the day of admission to hospital is treated as a day out of hospital, in place of the existing rules which treat such a day as a day in hospital. This will mean that people who spend frequent spells in hospital, eg for respite care, can gain an extra day's benefit. It will mean that the rules for AA/DLA will be brought into line with other Social Security benefits.

Regulations governing the withdrawal and downrating of benefits on admission to hospital have existed since the beginning of the National Insurance scheme in 1948. The reduction in benefit reflects the fact that, in hospital, the National Health Service is providing free care and maintenance. Regulations currently do not define what is a day in, or a day out of hospital. This leads to uncertainty. Social Security Commissioners have taken varying positions over the years. This has resulted in differing rules being developed according to the type of benefit in payment, creating difficulties for both customers and staff.

A Commissioner's decision made in 1996, which affected only AA and DLA, directed that both days of admission to, and days of discharge from hospital, should be treated as days in hospital. This means that benefit can now be lost on both the days of admission and discharge. For other Social Security benefits the current policy and practice is that the day of admission is treated as a day out of hospital and the day of discharge as a day in hospital.

We have concluded that the best way forward, to avoid further inconsistencies and confusion, would be to align the AA and DLA rules on hospital admission with the rules for other Social Security benefits. For the avoidance of doubt, we will make it explicit within the legislation that the day of admission is a day out of hospital and the day of discharge a day in hospital. Regulations will be laid at the earliest opportunity.

HOME DEPARTMENT

IND Offices, Croydon

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases there have been for the years *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998 and *(c)* 1999 to date of the IND offices in Croydon losing passports lodged with them. [81682]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Statistics relating to the number of passports lost in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate are not recorded centrally. Information kept centrally is in respect of the number of compensation claims dealt with as a result of maladministration, the majority of which will have arisen as a result of lost documents. The figures for the years since 1997 are as follows:

	Number
1997	41
1998	63
1999 to date	24

Prison Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 January 1999, *Official Report*, column 556, if the Prison Service has completed the short review on recruitment to the Prison Service; and if he will publish the conclusions. [81637]

Mr. George Howarth: The report of the review is nearing completion and will be submitted shortly to the Prison Service's director of personnel.

The report is not being written with a view to publication, but it will inform discussions with senior managers about possible new policy initiatives.

Asylum Seekers (Former Yugoslavia)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider lifting visa requirements for those leaving the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. [81900]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No; but where United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have arranged for medical and humanitarian evacuation for evacuees from Kosovo, the normal visa requirements will be waived.

Kosovar Albanians

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Kosovar Albanians will be evacuated from Macedonia to the UK; what criteria will be used as to who will qualify; what protection they will receive, and for how long; and where they will be housed. [81902]

Mr. Straw: The primary aim of the Government is to care for refugees in the region, and to facilitate their return to Kosovo. We are working together with our European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation partners and with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

We have long made it clear that we stand ready to respond to requests from UNHCR to take vulnerable refugees from Kosovo on a temporary basis. We have agreed with UNHCR that any recommendations for evacuation from the region should be co-ordinated through the office of the UNHCR. UNHCR will assess the desirability of temporary protection in the United Kingdom, will give priority to medical cases, other vulnerable persons and in support of family unity and make recommendations to the Home Office for consideration.

I announced on 20 April that arrangements had been agreed for the admission of 120 evacuees, mainly women and children, expected in the next few days. This decision was made following advice from UNHCR that the refugees were deemed to be vulnerable and in need of temporary protection outside the region.

People arriving under the UNHCR programme will be granted permission to enter in line with close family members already settled in the United Kingdom or 12 months' exceptional leave to enter to provide for their protection as requested by UNHCR.

I have tasked the Refugee Council with putting in place a special reception service for refugees arriving under the UNHCR programme. Under the plans, people will arrive in the United Kingdom through selected airports and will be placed in reception centres across the United Kingdom. The reception centres will be staffed by the Refugee Council and will provide temporary accommodation for refugees prior to their moving into more permanent accommodation. The Refugee Council is liaising closely with local authorities through the Local Government Association.

Freemasons

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken since 23 March to accelerate the process of establishing voluntary registers of membership of freemasonry in police forces in England and Wales; and how many police forces have now indicated that they have specific plans for introducing such registers. [81792]

Mr. Boateng: On 1 April, the Home Office wrote at official level to the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) requesting that ACPO write to each Chief Constable in England and Wales to ask them to set up voluntary, internal registers for their forces. ACPO duly wrote to each Chief Constable on 7 April. It is too early to say how many Chief Constables will set up such registers. However, an earlier ACPO survey of Chief Constables' views indicated that the overwhelming majority of Chief Constables supported in principle their creation.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *177–78*, when he now expects numerical data on freemasons within the police and other parts of the criminal justice system to be available. [81793]

Mr. Boateng: As soon as the voluntary internal registers which all Chief Constables in England and Wales have been asked by the Association of Chief Police Officers to put in place have been established, we will be able to make available for statistical purposes such numerical data as these registers reveal, on an ongoing basis. We anticipate that the first useful information will be available by October this year.

Arrangements for other categories of occupation under Home Office responsibility, including release of data for statistical purposes, will be determined once the internal registration arrangements for the Police Service have been set up and are in operation.

Police Authorities

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the proportion of elected representatives on police authorities in England; and if he will make a statement. [81849]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have no plans to change the proportion of elected representatives on police authorities. The elected representatives (councillor members appointed by local councils) have a majority of one over the combined total of magistrate members and independent members. I am satisfied that these non-elected members have skills and experience which are of benefit to police authorities. Police authorities have been established in their present form only since 1995, and some of them have had to re-form themselves as a result of local government reorganisation. I do not think it would be helpful to subject them to further change at this time.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Secondary School Admissions

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many representations he has received from parents in Havering concerning secondary school admission for September; [81610]

(2) what powers he has under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to require admission authorities to take part in consultation over secondary school admission arrangements with the local education authority; [81611]

(3) what powers he has under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to ensure that, in cases where a local education authority operates catchment areas for secondary school admission, all primary schools within the local education authority fall within a catchment area. [81612]

Ms Estelle Morris: To date, we have received 25 letters from parents in Havering not offered their preferred secondary school place for September 1999. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State could intervene only in an admissions issue where he is satisfied that a local education authority or governing body has acted unlawfully or "unreasonably", that is, in a way which no sensible authority or governing body would have acted. Our investigation of these complaints found no grounds for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's intervention.

Section 89 of the 1998 Act and its accompanying regulations place a new requirement on all admission authorities in an area to determine their admission arrangements in consultation with each other, taking account of local circumstances. Where an admission authority disagrees with another's proposed admission arrangements, it can object to the Adjudicator. We believe that school admissions arrangements are best determined at local level. Havering local education authority is responsible for consulting on and determining the arrangements for all county schools. The 1998 Act also requires my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to issue a code of practice on admissions. The School Admission Code of Practice, which came into force on 1 April 1999, offers guidance on all aspects of the school admissions process, including consultation.

Under the 1998 Act and the Code, it is for admission authorities to decide on their admission arrangements—including whether to operate catchment areas and what those areas should be—subject to consultation, and to the results of any complaint to the Adjudicator.

School Expulsions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many year 11, 10 and 9 pupils were expelled from schools in London and the South East over the last three years and for the first quarter of 1999. [81169]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the number of permanent exclusions for pupils aged 13, 14 and 15 is shown in the following table.

Academic year (age as at 31 August)

	1994–95			*1995–96*			*1996–97*		
	15	*14*	*13*	*15*	*14*	*13*	*15*	*14*	*13*
London	329	564	435	395	607	473	366	590	435
South East	332	466	297	397	531	321	391	480	412

Professional Statisticians

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff who have worked as professional statisticians in his Department and its predecessors have left on early retirement in each of the past 10 years. [81186]

Mr. Mudie: The number of "professional statisticians" who have left on early retirement in the last 10 years is five, including one medical retirement.

Year	*Number*
1994	2
1996	2
1997	1

"Professional statisticians" have been defined as those staff who were recruited as fast streamers to the Statistician Group via CSSB.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff by grade are employed as professional statisticians in his Department; how many of these staff have been accepted as fast stream by the Civil Service Selection Board; and how many have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society. [81206]

Mr. Mudie: Statistical work is undertaken by a range of specialists including Research Officers, Social Survey Officers and Economists. Within this Department, there are 6 Senior Civil Servants, 25 Grade 7s and 16 Assistant Statisticians employed as "professional" statisticians. In addition, our Department employs 6 Statistical Officers.

"Professional statistician" has been defined as those staff who were recruited as fast streamers to the Statistician Group via CSSB. By this definition it follows that all of those staff have been accepted as fast streamers.

Of those listed, 1 member of the SCS and 4 Grade 7s have been granted chartered statistician status by the RSS.

Consultations (Postal Costs)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will pay the postal costs of voluntary bodies and registered charities requested to respond to Government consultation documents; and if he will make a statement. [80923]

Mr. Mudie: The Department follows the Cabinet Office best practice guidance on consultations. We seek to make it as easy as possible for people to respond and will always consider providing a freepost address for responses to large-scale consultations involving the general public and the voluntary sector. We also make increasing use of dedicated email addresses which offer a very low cost alternative to postal responses.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the value was of the *(a)* funds administered by the TECs and *(b)* overheads of the TECs in the last year for which figures are available. [81882]

Mr. Mudie: Based on the 1997–98 consolidated annual statutory audited accounts of 73 English TECs, the value of the government funds administered by the TECs was £1,455 million and overheads of the TECs were £178 million.

Personal Advisers

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what (i) general training is provided for personal advisers on New Deals and (ii) specific training is provided for personal advisers assisting *(a)* young people, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* people with disabilities and *(d)* older people. [77541]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 23 April 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply direct to your question regarding: (i) the general training provided for personal advisers on New Deal and (ii) specific training provided for personal advisers assisting (a) young people, (b) lone parents, (c) people with disabilities and (d) older people. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

All Employment Service staff, including Personal Advisers, have access to a comprehensive range of training covering all the knowledge and skills they need to do their job. The amount of training a Personal Adviser will require is dependent on their role and responsibilities, their previous experience and their existing level of knowledge and skills.

As an indication only, if a person was recruited to undertake basic advisory duties and had no previous knowledge of Employment Service business, they would require a minimum of 23 days training to be considered as having a basic level of competence. However, this does not include consolidation, assimilation and experience, all of which are crucial elements of the development of advisory knowledge and skills. This training includes job-broking, communication, interviewing and caseload management skills, knowledge of Employment Legislation, Jobseeker's Allowance and other benefits, including In-Work Benefits, Employment and Training Opportunities and the use of our IT systems.

In addition to the general training, if Advisers were to undertake specialist Advisory duties, for example, New Deal Adviser for People with Disabilities, they would require anything between 2 days and 6 weeks further training.

I will deal with the training provided for the specific types of New Deal Personal Advisers in the order that you have raised them.

a] Young People: 18–24 years

The general training described above gives the Personal Advisers the skills and knowledge to deal with this client group.

b] Lone Parents

In addition to the basic level of training detailed above, which Advisers have before attending a New Deal for Lone Parents Adviser training programme, Advisers are provided with an additional 27 days of training. This specific programme covers all the unique knowledge and skills required to understand and advise this particular client group. This includes:

an overview of the issues and problems of lone parents (provided by external organisations NCOPF, Gingerbread & The Daycare Trust;)

new business processes and cultural requirements;

detailed benefits and allowances training;

advanced interviewing, presentational, marketing & representational skills.

c] People with Disabilities

As before, the amount of training required will be dependent on an Adviser's previous experience and their current level of competence. If they have not previously been a Disability Employment Adviser they will need 5 weeks of training as described below—Block A and Block B. People who have already had the 3 week training for DEAs—Block A, would only need the 2 week New Deal specific event—Block B.

Block A training includes:

non-directive employment related counselling skills;

issues and problems faced by people with new or long standing disabilities—delivered by external organisations;

disability awareness, eg. mental health, learning disabilities, hearing and visual impairment, epilepsy—delivered by specialist speakers such as RNIB and RNID.

Block B New Deal specific training includes:

working in partnership and cultural requirements;

employability measures and issues for gaining, retaining and sustaining employment;

holistic approaches and medical conditions—provided by an external speaker;

presentation and representational skills.

d] Older People—25+

New Deal Personal Advisers dealing with the 25+ age group would have an additional 2 day event including eligibility, client self-marketing, identifying and submitting to suitable vacancies/other provision and follow through.

50+

This is a new initiative. Work is currently being undertaken to establish the training needs of the Personal Advisers dealing with this group.

You may also be interested to know that all training given to New Deal Personal Advisers has been designed to help them achieve an S/NVQ in Guidance.

I hope this response covers all the information you wanted.

New Deal (Young People)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many employers participating in the New Deal for Young People have taken on from the scheme *(a)* 1 employee, *(b)* between 2 and 10 employees, *(c)* between 10 and 50 employees, *(d)* between 50 and 100 employees, *(e)* between 100 and 250 employees and *(f)* more than 250 employees. [79826]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 11 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *236*.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many employers participating in the New Deal for Young People who have not continued the employment of subsidised employees on the cessation of their subsidy, have subsequently taken on further subsidised employees. [79825]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Material for employers, and guidance to staff of the Employment Service and its partners, on the operation of New Deal for Young People make it clear that it is not acceptable for employers to replace one New Deal employee and another for the purpose of perpetuating the subsidy. Jobcentre staff are advised to refer suspected cases to a central investigation unit: to date, none has been reported.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people left each New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds option for a sustained unsubsidised job for each month between January 1998 and January 1999. [81697]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 22 April 1999]*: The information set out in the following table shows how many people left each of the four Options available through New Deal for Young People for jobs, in each month from January 1998 to January 1999 and had not returned to claim Jobseekers Allowance within three months. In addition to these, 41,140 young people have left for sustained unsubsidised employment from other stages of New Deal, and an additional 11,420 have entered sustained subsidised employment.

	Employment option	*FTET option*	*Voluntary sector option*	*Environment task force*
January 1998	—	—	—	—
February 1998	—	—	—	—
March 1998	1	—	—	—
April 1998	9	5	—	—
May 1998	11	12	1	5
June 1998	10	15	5	1
July 1998	31	36	13	11
August 1998	65	44	13	9
September 1998	83	91	30	25
October 1998	150	236	77	63
November 1998	137	210	69	48
December 1998	176	129	61	60
January 1999	246	232	116	95
Total	919	1,001	385	317

State Schools (Expenditure)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of GDP he expects to be spent on state schools across the UK in the years *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 as a result of the comprehensive spending review. [81899]

Ms Estelle Morris: We estimate that recurrent spending on state schools across the UK in 1998–99 will be approximately 2.9 per cent. of Gross Domestic Product. We are unable at this stage to offer a meaningful estimate of spending on state schools in 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

The extra £19 billion across the UK over the next three years provided by the Comprehensive Spending Review for the education sector overall will deliver the manifesto commitment to increase the share of GDP spent on education from 4.8 per cent. in 1996–97 to 5 per cent. by 2001–02.

FE College Principals (Retirement Packages)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the compliance with the FEFC guidance on retirement financial arrangements for principals of tertiary colleges of the provision made for the recently retired Principal of Wirral Metropolitan College. [81210]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State notes that the provision made for the recently retired Principal of Wirral Metropolitan College complies with the guidance issued by the FEFC.

DEFENCE

NHS Trusts

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was paid by his Department to each of the health trusts in which MDHUs operate for the treatment of military personnel in each of the last three years. [80572]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 13 April 1999]*: The amounts, in £ million, paid to the three MDHU host NHS trusts for the treatment of military personnel in each of the last three years are shown in the following table. The sums shown are the net payment, taking into account

the abatement of charges for the contribution of military clinical staff serving in the MDHU to the treatment of Service patients.

NHS Trust	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Plymouth Hospital (Derriford)	1.485	1.381	1.645
Frimley Park Hospital	2.757	3.328	3.652
Peterborough Hospitals	2.036	1.619	1.964

[1] The sums shown for 1998–99 are estimates, based on forecast patient numbers for the year made in the light of numbers treated between April and December 1998. The final sums will not be known until patient numbers for the full financial year are available and a contract reconciliation exercise has been carried out. This is likely to take until June.

RN Physiological Laboratory

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *307–08*, if he will list, by case, the experiments that have been performed on goats at the Royal Navy Physiological Laboratory in each of the last 12 months. [81633]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 23 April 1999:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the former Royal Navy Physiological Laboratory (RNPL) which is now part of the Centre for Human Sciences (CHS) Sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

You asked for details, by case, of the experiments, involving goats that have been carried out in each of the last 12 months. All the work is aimed at reducing the risk of serious decompression illness in man following the evacuation of a sunken submarine. Prior to being used in an experiment, goats are familiarised with the experimental procedures and the vessels in which trials will take place. All experiments involve an exposure to raised pressure where the breathing gas is either air or an atmosphere that simulates a possible atmosphere that could be present on a disabled submarine, such as elevated carbon dioxide.

At the end of the exposure to raised pressure the goats are returned to normorbaric pressure, either through decompression to surface, simulating rescue from a distressed submarine (rescue type exposure), or through a simulated submarine escape at the compression and decompression rates to which men have been exposed (escape type exposure). Oxygen breathing is known to decrease the risk of decompression illness and limited oxygen breathing has been used in some initial studies to assess the magnitude of the potential benefit.

The goats are closely monitored for several hours after the experiment for signs of decompression illness. Concentration of various blood constituents may be monitored. A small number of animals have had minor surgery to reduce the trauma or stress involved in collecting an arterial blood sample. In addition the animals may be sedated to further reduce their discomfort. Some goats have also been sedated prior to magnetic resonance imaging of the brain in order to detect sub-clinical effects of repeat pressure exposures.

The details of the experiments over the last 12 months are as follows:

Month	Number of goats	Experiment type
April 1999	0	
March 1999	18	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
February 1999	18	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
January 1999	8	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
January 1999	9	Rescue type exposure, decompression to surface
December 1998	4	Escape type exposure, arterial blood samples taken
November 1998	16	Escape type exposure
October 1998	26	Escape type exposure
September 1998	12	Oxygen breathing prior to surfacing, Escape type exposure
September 1998	5	Rescue type exposure, decompression to surface
August 1998	12	Oxygen breathing prior to surfacing, Escape type exposure
August 1998	5	Rescue type exposure, straight decompression to surface
July 1998	0	
June 1998	0	
May 1998	0	

In addition to these experiments, the following familiarisation and acquaint procedures were carried out:

June 1998: 6 Goats

August 1998: 7 Goats

March 1999: 9 Goats

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *307–08*, how many goats have died in experiments at the Royal Navy Physiological Laboratory in each of the last 12 months. [81634]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 23 April 1999:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the former Royal Navy Physiological Laboratory (RNPL) which is now part of the Centre for Human Sciences (CHS) Sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

You asked for details about the number of goats that have died in experiments in the last 12 months in DERA's research programme to determine the pressure and time limits for the safe escape of Navy personnel from a sunken submarine.

Animals that demonstrate mild or moderate symptoms of decompression illness during any experiment are treated in the same way as humans, with oxygen and recompression therapy. Where sympton are such that recompression therapy would be unlikely to effect a complete recovery, the animal is humanely killed. The number of goats humanely killed in each of the last 12 months is as follows:

Year/month	Number of goats humanely killed at end of experiment
1999	
April	0
March	0
February	0
January	9
1998	
December	2
November	4
October	0

Year/month	Number of goats humanely killed at end of experiment
September	2
August	1
July	0
June	0
May	0

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *307–08*, how many goats have been injured before undergoing experiments at the Royal Navy Physiological Laboratory in the last 12 months; and what anaesthetics are administered to goats before experiments take place. [81635]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 23 April 1999:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the former Royal Navy Physiological Laboratory (RNPL) which is now part of the Centre for Human Sciences (CHS) Sector of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

You asked for details about the treatment of the goats used in DERA's research programme to determine the pressure and time limits for the safe escape of Navy personnel from a sunken submarine.

No goats are injured before undergoing experiments at DERA's CHS.

With regard to the anaesthetics used on the goats, prior to magnetic resonance imaging where the goats have to be kept absolutely still, they are sedated with a combination of the sedative, Domitor and the analgesic Torbugesic. Magnetic resonance imaging is not a painful process but the analgesic brings about a more profound level of sedation when combined with Domitor. Lignocaine is used as a local anaesthetic prior to arterial cannulation for blood sampling.

General anaesthesia is not used on the goats in the DERA research programme itself. However, animals prepared surgically for arterial blood sampling receive halothane/oxygen/nitrous oxide.

I hope this information is helpful.

Personal Protection Weapons (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what legal authority his Department may issue personal protection weapons in Northern Ireland; what safeguards prevent the misuse of such weapons; and how many such weapons have been reported (i) missing and (ii) stolen in the last five years. [81138]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 21 April 1999]:* Members of the armed forces are entitled to bear firearms and ammunition, without a firearm certificate, under exemptions from firearms legislation. Should Service personnel wish to hold a firearm for a private purpose, however, they must obtain a firearms certificate.

The Army has in place a comprehensive range of procedures designed to prevent misuse of personal protection weapons (PPWs) issued by the Ministry of Defence in Northern Ireland.

The stringent application and approval process takes into account the actual risk to a solder, his/her personal circumstances and general conduct, and advice from the Royal Ulster Constabulary. PPWs are issued only to soldiers who are considered likely to be at risk and there is no automatic entitlement for any category of soldier.

All soldiers with PPWs are given a full briefing concerning security. They also receive handling instruction and live firing practice before issue of the weapon, and at four monthly intervals thereafter.

Any changes to the circumstances of the PPW issue or to the conditions on which they are held must be recorded and approved by the individuals Commanding Officer. Commanding Officers also review bi-annually the issue of PPWs to soldiers under their command.

In total, over the last five years, only one Army issue PPW has been reported as missing and five as stolen.

Building and Property Group

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what security vetting is undertaken of staff employed by Building and Property Group Ltd. and their sub-contractors operating at his Department's establishments. [80044]

Mr. Spellar *[pursuant to his reply, 14 April 1999, c. 240]:* I regret the answer given was incorrect. My reply should have read

"BPD Ltd. were responsible for security vetting their own staff until last year, when their List X status was removed. The firm continues to carry out Basic Checks for its own staff, but more detailed checks are required before unescorted access to HMNB is allowed. These are carried out by the Defence Vetting Agency, and passes are issued by HMNB on the basis of these checks."

Exercise Dimming Sun

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on which dates the nuclear weapon exercise Dimming Sun will be held; which Government departments and organisations will be taking part in this exercise; whether the media will be invited to the exercise; and what will be the scenario of the exercise. [80826]

Mr. Doug Henderson: It is planned to held Exercise DIMMING SUN between 14 to 18 June 1999. It is a joint UK/US nuclear weapon accident exercise, which will test the procedures in place for responding to the logistic movement of US nuclear weapons. Local authorities and emergency services in Norfolk will be participating in this exercise alongside response forces from the Ministry of Defence, the US Government, and other relevant UK Government Departments and organisations. It is also planned that a media briefing will be held to announce details before the exercise.

Tours of Duty

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he intends to modify the Strategic Defence Review assumptions concerning the length of tours of duty on operations. [81662]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 22 April 1999]:* No.

Naval Deployment

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current proportion of the *(a)* Royal Navy and *(b)* RN Fleet, (i) committed and (ii) warned to deploy for operations. [81666]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 22 April 1999]:* As at 19 April 1999, 55 per cent. of available RN ships (excluding those in long-term maintenance), submarines and supporting Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels were deployed on operations. In staffing terms, this represents about 15 per cent. of the total trained strength of the Royal Navy and approximately 25 per cent. of the RFA. All other RN units are available for deployment at various periods of notice, depending on their readiness states.

Air Force Deployment

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current proportion of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force deployed on operations. [81661]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 22 April 1999]:* Around one and a half per cent. of Royal Auxiliary Air Force personnel are currently deployed on operations.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current proportion of the *(a)* RAF and *(b)* RAF Strike Command, (i) committed and (ii) warned to deploy for operations. [81667]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 22 April 1999]:* Approximately 6 per cent. of the trained strength of the RAF and 8 per cent. of Strike Command's trained strength is currently deployed on operations. Approximately 13 per cent. of RAF personnel and 16 per cent. of Strike Command personnel are warned to deploy.

The figures represent personnel deployed away from their parent station and, as such, do not account for personnel supporting operations from their normal station, such as those at RAF Bruggen. Similarly, the figures do not include personnel working at Strike Command or Group Headquarters who are involved as part of their normal tasks in planning activity in support of operations.

Army Deployment

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Army's *(a)* divisional and *(b)* brigade headquarters are (i) committed to operations and (ii) warned to deploy for operations. [81669]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 22 April 1999]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Committed to operations	*Warned to deploy on operations*
Divisional headquarters	nil	nil
Brigade headquarters	2	2

DESO Overseas Offices

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the overseas offices of the Defence Export Services Organisation are situated; when each office was established; how many staff are currently employed in each; and what is the budget for 1999–2000 for each. [81732]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 22 April 1999]:* Details of overseas offices of the Defence Export Services Organisation are as follows:

	Date established	*Number of staff*	*Budget 1999–2000 (£000)*
Australia	1989	2	102.8
Brunei	1995	2	103.6
Germany	1991	14	296.7
India	1984	5	138.6
Indonesia	1991	3	80.0
Kuwait[1]	1988	9	156.4
Malaysia	1986	4.5	131.1
Philippines	1997	3	106.7
Qatar	1998	2	114.1
Saudi Arabia[2]	1985	59	0
South Korea	1988	2	147.9
Turkey	1988	1	92.7

[1] Six staff are employed in the Kuwait Programme Office and are funded by the customer
[2] 59 staff are employed on the Al Yamamah programme and are funded by the customer

HEALTH

Liver Disease

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to provide increased funding for the national liver units. [81632]

Mr. Hutton: Each year all units designated by the National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group, which include the liver transplant units and the specialised paediatric liver disease units, apply for the funding they require for the following year. Units can include requests for additional funding to cover increases in activity and service developments. We take into account the recommendations of the Advisory Group when considering funding levels for the national specialist services.

The current allocation is £29.5 million for the liver transplant service and £4.7 million for the specialised paediatric liver service. Over £1 million of additional funding has been agreed for developments in these services in 1999–2000, which includes funding for 20 additional paediatric liver transplants.

Secure Units

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what requirements are placed on local authorities to monitor and record the ethnic origins of those held in secure units. [81895]

Mr. Hutton: Under the Children Act 1989, the local authority responsible for a looked-after child in a secure unit should ensure details of racial origin, culture and linguistic background are recorded and stored. Secure units are required to record and provide ethnic data to the social services inspectorate in advance of inspections.

Dentistry

Mr. Lock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in the Wyre Forest constituency area are taking new registrations of NHS patients. [81892]

Mr. Denham: Although there are dentists undertaking National Health Service work, their lists are full and therefore no dentists in the Wyre Forest constituency are currently accepting new NHS patients. The health authority is able to direct patients to dentists in neighbouring areas who are still accepting NHS patients. Emergency pain relief clinics are run in Kidderminster and Worcester. Worcestershire Health Authority has recently submitted a personal dental services pilot for consideration that is intended to tackle local problems of access to a dentist.

Food Standards Agency

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* other NHS bodies of implementing the charges for the proposed Food Standards Agency. [81795]

Mr. Hutton: No such estimate has been made. Under the Government's proposals, food retail and catering businesses in hospitals and other National Health Service bodies will be liable for the levy if they are required to register with their local authority under the Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991, as amended in 1997. We received a large response to public consultation on the draft legislation and proposals for a levy scheme. We will introduce a Bill this session if time is available.

TREASURY

Carbon Emissions

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the basis of the Government's estimate that the climate change levy at the proposed indicative levels will reduce carbon emissions by 1.5 million tonnes per annum. [79350]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 30 March 1999]:* As indicated in table 5.1 of 1999 Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report, the estimate of the reduction in carbon emissions resulting from the climate change levy was based on calculations made using the Department of Trade and Industry energy model.

Environmental Taxation

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy on environmental taxation; and if he will make a statement. [78410]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 March 1999]:* The Government's Statement of Intent on Environmental Taxation published in July 1997, sets out the Government's policy on environmental taxation. It commits the Government to exploring the scope for using the tax system—as one instrument, in combination with others like regulation and voluntary action—to secure environmental objectives, and details the criteria used to assess environmental taxes.

The 1999 Budget contained the biggest package of environmental tax reforms ever announced in this country. This will provide continuing incentives for environmental improvement and underlines the Government's commitment to protect and, where possible, enhance our environment.

Details of the Budget 99 environmental tax package are contained in the 1999 Economic and Financial Strategy Review and Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Computers (Taxable Benefit)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of employees charged income tax on any taxable benefit arising from the provision of computer equipment by an employer in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [81707]

Ms Hewitt: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Professional Statisticians

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many staff who have worked as professional statisticians in his Department have left on early retirement in each of the past 10 years; [81182]

(2) how many staff by grade are employed as professional statisticians in his Department; how many of these staff have been accepted as fast stream by the Civil Service Selection Board; and how many have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society. [81202]

Ms Hewitt: Statistical work is undertaken by a range of specialists such as Research Officers and Social Survey Officers, as well as Statisticians. The following number of professional Statisticians, all of whom have been recruited via the Civil Service Selection Board, are employed in the Departments and Agencies responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

Office for National Statistics: 123

Treasury: 22

Customs and Excise: 9

Inland Revenue: 21

In addition, the following number of Statistical Officers are employed:

Office for National Statistics: 8

Customs and Excise: 8

Treasury: 1

Inland Revenue: 1

It is not known how many professional Statisticians have been granted Chartered status by the Royal Statistical Society. This information is not recorded and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

In the last ten years, the following number of professional Statisticians have left on early retirement:

Office for National Statistics: 23

Customs and Excise: 2

Treasury: 2

Inland Revenue: 1

Euro

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what staff have been tasked to monitor progress in passing the five economic tests for joining the euro. [81736]

Ms Hewitt: As the Prime Minister explained to the hon. Member on 13 April 1999, *Official Report*, column 2, the Treasury is the Department responsible for economic and monetary union issues.

Treaty of Amsterdam

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each of the new responsibilities which he will assume when the signed Treaty of Amsterdam takes effect and for each *(a)* the likely effect on departmental staffing, *(b)* the bodies or persons in the European Union principally concerned and *(c)* the relevant section of that treaty and the consolidated treaties of the European Union and European Community. [80407]

Ms Hewitt: The Treaty of Amsterdam will have minimal impact on the responsibilities of the Department and its staffing.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Public Interest Immunity Certificates

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Public Interest Immunity Certificates he has signed since coming into office. [81446]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 20 April 1999]*: Since 1 May 1997, I have signed two Public Interest Immunity Certificates. Both certificates were to protect the operations of the intelligence agencies for which I am responsible and were within the criteria agreed in the light of the recommendations of the Scott Inquiry.

In addition, one certificate was signed by another Foreign Office Minister, Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean.

Devolution Concordat

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials from his Department have held with (i) the Scottish Office and (ii) the Welsh Office on the drawing up of a concordat governing arrangements by which the (1) Scottish Parliament, (2) National Assembly for Wales and (3) Northern Ireland Assembly may make representations to overseas Governments. [81893]

Mr. Robin Cook: The UK Government will continue to be responsible for international relations after devolution. We recognise that there will be areas within their devolved responsibilities in which the devolved administrations will none the less have interests involving other countries. FCO officials have worked with officials of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices on draft Concordats on international relations which will be put to the devolved administration when they take office. Ministers have been kept fully informed of the progress of these discussions.

WALES

Euro Task Force

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he had made of the cost to date to public funds of the Euro Task Force for Wales. [80084]

Mr. Michael: All members of the Task Force give their time free. Members are permitted to claim out of pocket expenses for attending meetings, but to date none has done so.

As at 31 March 1999, the Task Force's euro awareness activities incurred a direct cost of £9,256 to public funds.

Noise (Trunk Roads)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of the problem of noise to residents from the A449 trunk road near Llanishen in Monmouthshire; [81348]

(2) when he proposes to publish revised criteria for noise mitigation measures on existing trunk roads. [81349]

Mr. Hain: No noise assessment has been undertaken in Llanishen, Monmouthshire. A preliminary analysis of the noise levels from the A449 at Llandenny, immediately adjacent to the road, indicated that it would not meet the noise mitigation criteria announced recently for England. I announced on 23 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *126–27*, that we would be extending this analysis of noise levels adjacent to the trunk road network in Wales and considering the scope for adapting the criteria to meet specific Welsh circumstances. This review will take some six to nine months to complete.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Professional Statisticians

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff who have worked as professional statisticians in his Department have left on early retirement in each of the past 10 years. [81180]

Mr. Michael: None.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff by grade are employed as professional statisticians in his Department; how many of these staff have been accepted as fast stream by the Civil Service Selection Board; and how many have been granted chartered statistician status by the Royal Statistical Society. [81192]

Mr. Michael: Twenty-five Welsh Office staff are currently employed as professional statisticians. The numbers by grade are:

Grade	*Number*
Senior Civil Service	1
Grade 6	2
Grade 7	14
Assistant Statistician	8

All the Assistant Statisticians were appointed through the Civil Service Selection Board (CSSB) and are regarded as being in a fast stream training grade. More senior grades are not designated as fast stream, or otherwise, but most of the statisticians in these grades joined the Statistician Group through CSSB. Two are Royal Statistical Society chartered statisticians.

National Assembly

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the directions setting the pay and allowances of members of the National Assembly for Wales. [82304]

Mr. Hain: I have today put copies of The National Assembly for Wales (Assembly Members) (Salaries) Direction 1999, The National Assembly for Wales (Assembly Members) (Allowances) Direction 1999 and The National Assembly for Wales (Assembly Members) (Resettlement Grants) Direction 1999 in the Libraries of the House.

Inward Investment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials from his Department have held with the DTI concerning the drawing up of a concordat governing arrangements for encouraging inward investment to different parts of the United Kingdom. [81894]

Mr. Michael: There are on-going discussions on this matter, involving both Ministers and officials. The concordat is one of a number of concordats which will be discussed and concluded between United Kingdom Government Departments and the devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland once they are established.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SIXTH SERIES OFFICIAL REPORT **VOLUME 329**

SESSION 1998–99

13th April—23rd April 1999

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index to the daily parts and weekly Hansard is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes, and cannot, therefore, be used in conjunction with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There will, however, be headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one will find not only Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc., under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Contributions by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Significant rulings and statements are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements'.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, res = resolution, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A30
704w

A47
52w

A449
Noise 728w

A505
71w

Abbott, Ms Diane
Questions
Business questions 377–8

Absenteeism
Public sector 599w

Access to Environmental Information Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (23.04.99) 1210

Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R and money res* (14.04.99) 230–332
Order relating to Com (23.04.99) 1211
Questions
676w
Equal opportunities 674–5w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 604w
Treasury 586w

Accident and emergency departments
104w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust 422–3w

Accidents
MV Gaul 369–70w
Nuclear weapons 372w
Roads 76w, (20.04.99) 818–22

Acquittals
1042–3

Adams, Mrs Irene
Questions
Firearms 904

Additional personal allowance
121–2w, 427w

Administration of justice
EC action 12–3w, 510w
Northern Ireland 359w
Personal records 359w
Rape 662w
Scotland 189–90w

Adoption
104w

Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R (23.04.99) 1140–202

Advertising
Government departments 601w
Individual savings accounts 492w, 587w
Prostitution 669w
Scottish Office 283–4w

Advisory bodies
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 84–7w
Dept for Education and Employment 163w
Dept of Health 271w, 641–2w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 57–8w, 80w
Home Office 310–2w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 515w
Northern Ireland Office 139–41w
Scottish Office 524–5w
Welsh Office 499–500w

Advisory Committee on Pesticides
596–7w

Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment
596–7w, 623–4w

Advisory services
Immigration 484–5w
Information technology 895
Pensions 279w
Redditch 894–5

Africa
Fishery agreements 517w

Age Limits on Health Care Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (16.04.99) 541

Agenda 2000
EC enlargement 507w

Agriculture
See also Farmers
Biodiversity 391w
Buildings 49w
Land 296w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
Questions
Demonstrations, Parliament Square 27–8w
Millennium Exhibition, Educational visits 273–4w, 305w
Millennium Exhibition, Sponsorship 577–8w
Museums and galleries, Educational visits 81w

Air force
Deployment 723–5w

Air pollution
Health hazards 540–1w
Monitoring 409–10w

Albania
Overseas aid 576w

Alcoholic drinks
Excise duties 616w, 618–9w
Smuggling 615w
Young people (16.04.99) 534–40

Al-Fayed, Mohammed
Hamilton, Neil 1044

Algeria
Export credit guarantees 553w

"Alterations to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (Draft)"
(22.04.99) 1131

Alternative energy
94–5w, 330–1w
Business 332w
House of Commons 28–9w
Northern Ireland 360w
Taxation 332w
Wales 287–8w

Alternative medicine
Cancer 106w
Prisoners 257–8w
Side effects 542w
Wales 502w

Alton
Gas fired power stations 455–6w

Ambassadors for British business
Public appointments 511w

Ambulance services
Bedfordshire 337w

Amess, Mr David
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 96–8
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service 1040–1

Amess, Mr David*—*continued
"Modernising Government White Paper" 601w
Pensions 568–70
Tax yields 327w

Amphetamines
Drug seizures 581w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 25, (19.04.99) 612–4

Anderson, Janet**, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Debates etc.
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 158–60
Questions
Genetically modified organisms, Food 83–4w
Millennium, Health services 274–5w
Millennium Exhibition, Educational visits 273–4w, 305w
Millennium Exhibition, Engineering 274w
Millennium Exhibition, Environment protection 272–3w
Millennium Exhibition, Public transport 274w
Millennium Exhibition, Publications 303–4w
Millennium Exhibition, Sponsorship 577–8w
Millennium Fund 83w
Radio, Licensing 90–1w
Television, Disability aids 89w
Television, Licensing 89w
World Tourism Organisation, Membership 578w

Angola
Export credit guarantees 94w

Animal experiments
19–21w
Navy 243–4w, 719–21w

Animal Procedures Committee
Public appointments 581–2w

Animal products
Export controls 392w
Health hazards 393w

Animal welfare
1031–2
France 1033
Slaughterhouses 519w

Annuities
592w

Apprentices
171w

Arable area payments scheme
593–4w

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
627–8w

Aricept
530w

Armed conflict
Kosovo 45–6w, 217–9, 242w, 323–4w, 506w, 631w, 679–82, 899–902, 906–7
Overseas residence 559–60w

Armed forces
Balkans 634w
Ceremonies 323w
Clothing 40–1w
Convictions 40w
Deployment 632–3w, 722w
Gibraltar 41w

***Armed forces**—continued*
Health services 44–6w, 114w, 566w, 631w, 718–9w
Indonesia 37w
Malaysia 562w
Personal records 370–1w
Pregnancy 41w
Sick leave 371w
Statutory sick pay 371–2w
Training 632w
Young people 560–1w

Armenia
506–7w

Arms control
47–8w

Arms trade
EC action 407w
Economic Community of West African States 341–2w
Export controls 34w, 123w, 260–2w, 455w, 552–3w, 612–3w
Indonesia 263w
Sri Lanka 262w
Yugoslavia 45w

***Armstrong, Rt Hon Hilary**, Minister of State for Local Government and Housing, Dept of the Environment, Transport and the Regions*
Questions
Council tax 50w, 70–1w, 476w
Council tax benefits, Elderly 415w
Council tax capping 50w, 410w
Kingshurst Parish Council 77w
Local government, Ethics 53w
Local government finance, Rochford 18

Army
Deployment 724w
Food 562w

Arrest warrants
Interpol 5w
Northern Ireland 363–4w

Arrests
Ethnic groups 15w
Proscribed organisations 139–40w

Asbestos
Imports 96w

Ascension Island
Fuels 256w

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 23–4

Ashford
Women's prisons 316w

Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust
Accident and emergency departments 422–3w

Ashton, Mr Joe
Debates etc.
Jones, Fiona, Points of order (19.04.99) 571–2

Assisted areas
367w
Wales 285w

Asylum
see Political refugees

Atherton, Ms Candy
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (21.04.99) 868–9

Atkins, Charlotte
Questions
VAT, Clothing 588w

Atkinson, Mr David
Questions
Council tax, Bournemouth 226
Criminal Records Bureau, Fees and charges 7w

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 1007–8

Atlantic Ocean
World heritage sites 706w

Attorney General
Ethnic groups 3w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 397w

Austin, Mr John
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 51, 85–8
Questions
British Indian Ocean Territory, Emigration 511w
British Indian Ocean Territory, Visits 511w
Kosovo, War crimes 613w
Libyan Arab Republic, Diplomatic relations 511–2w
Millennium, Health services 274–5w
Sanctions, Libyan Arab Republic 503–4w
Trade promotion, Libyan Arab Republic 503–4w

Availability for work
Incapacity benefit 457w

Aviation
EC action (22.04.99) 1130
Falkland Islands 42w, 405–6w
Millennium compliance 75–6w
Wales 284w

B5404
73–4w

Back pain
NHS Direct 652w

Badgers
see Bovine tuberculosis

Baglan Bay
Gas fired power stations 268w

Bahamas
Criminal investigation (14.04.99) 346–52

Baker, Norman
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 943–8, 952
Questions
Advisory Committee on Pesticides 596–7w
Animal experiments 19w
Bovine somatotropin, Dairy products 220w
British Rail 67w
Car allowances 427w
China, Human rights 36w
Crown Prosecution Service 610w
Developing countries, Trade 235w
Dolphins 477w
Electronic surveillance, EC action 418w
Environmental impact assessment, Treasury 490w
Exhaust emissions 412w
Genetically modified organisms 1w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 56w, 259w, 368w, 411w
Genetically modified organisms, Departmental responsibilities 594w
Genetically modified organisms, Salmon 525w, 627w
Genetically modified organisms, USA 291w
Pesticides, Waste disposal 519–20w
Ports, Newhaven 66w
Potatoes, USA 296w

***Baker, Norman**—continued*
Public transport, Grants 66w
Public transport, Rural areas 411–2w
Railways, Standards 223–4
Seeds, Certification 518w
Slaughterhouses, Animal welfare 519w
Social security benefits, Carers 564
Strategic Rail Authority 67w
Trade, Environment protection 551–2w
Urban railways, Grants 67w

Baldock
Roads 369w

Baldry, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 918, 933–8, 964
Questions
Lorries, Excise duties 8–9
New deal for disabled people 559

Balkans
Armed forces 634w

Ballard, Jackie
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1143–4
Roads, Accidents (20.04.99) 818–20, 822
Questions
Aricept 530w
Disability living allowance, Mentally ill 465–6w
Excise duties, Diesel fuel 119w
Multiple sclerosis, Research 648–50w
Taxation, Females 329w

Ballot papers
Braille 418w

Bananas
Caribbean 96–7w
Developing countries 209
EC external trade 96–7w, 319w, 504–5w

Bangladesh
Visas 695

Bank notes
493–4w
Euro 494w

Banks
Fees and charges 605w

***Banks, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 497, 508
Questions
English Sports Council, National Lottery 89–90w
Football 402w
Football, Insurance 90w
Sports, Disabled 87w
Sports, National Lottery 275w
Squash 578w

Banner Committee
see Animal Procedures Committee

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1110–4
Public footpaths, Motor vehicles (21.04.99) 885
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 902
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 554

Barristers
534w, 675w
Limited liability 429w

Barristers *—continued*
Standards 1043–4

Barron, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 57–60
Questions
Agenda 2000, EC enlargement 507w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 899
Planning permission, Rotherham 549w

Baton rounds
Export controls 456w

Battle, Mr John*, Minister of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Alternative energy 94–5w
Consumer councils 263–7w
East Midlands Electricity, Correspondence 504w
Gas fired power stations, Alton 455–6w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority 450w
Human Genetics Advisory Commission, Conflict of interests 449w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Japan 451–2w
Radioactive wastes 706–7w
Science enterprise challenge 453–4w
Secondment, Dept of Trade and Industry 450–1w
Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 605w
University Challenge Fund 454w
Uranium, Storage 454–5w
Wellcome Trust, Grants 450w

Bayley, Mr Hugh*, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Benefits Agency Medical Service, Contracts 277w
Disability living allowance 462w
Disability living allowance, Eltham 157–8w
Disability living allowance, Hearing impaired 462–4w
Disability living allowance, Mentally ill 465–6w
Incapacity benefit 555–6
Incapacity benefit, Availability for work 457w
Incapacity benefit, Exservicemen 401–2w
Incapacity benefit, West Midlands 522w
Medical examinations 457w
Motability 637–9w
National carers' strategy 568
New deal for disabled people 559, 564–5
Severe disablement allowance 592w
Social security benefits, Carers 564
Social security benefits, Disabled 158w, 456w, 555, 566, 709–10w
Social security benefits, Mentally ill 556
War pensions, Hearing impaired 307–8w

BBC
Public appointments 1054–5

BBC External Services
Finance 510w

Beard, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 602

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret*, President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons*
Questions
BBC, Public appointments 1054–5
Business statements 371–1057
Commonwealth, Capital punishment 467w

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret *—continued*
European Legislation Select Committee 275w
Lobbying, President of the Council 29w
Millennium compliance, Publicity 480–1w
Privy Council Office Judicial Committee, Capital punishment 29w
Public appointments, President of the Council 302–3w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, President of the Council 466–7w
Written questions, President of the Council 302w

Bedfordshire
Ambulance services 337w
Bus services 76w
Hospitals 337w
Institutional care 376w
Residential homes 337w

Beef
Exports 902
Northern Ireland 321w
Wales 599w

Bees
Horticulture 674w

Begg, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1081, 1103–4

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 955
Questions
Hypothermia, Northern Ireland 141–3w
MV Lough Foyle, Pay 605w
Overseas aid, Accountability 208
Pre-school education, Northern Ireland 699–700w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Debates etc.
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 408–12
Questions
Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99, Equal opportunities 674–5w
Class sizes 218–9
Crime prevention 10w
Curfews, Children 8w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre 17–9w
Fire engines 661w
Home detention curfews 660w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 900–1
Medway Secure Training Centre 8–9w
Police 9w
Police, Efficiency scrutinies 9w
Police, Finance 7–8w
Probation officers, Age 660w
Probation officers, Retirement 658–60w

Belfast Agreement
905–6

Bell, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 26–7, (19.04.99) 605–7

Bell, Mr Stuart*, Second Church Estates Commissioner*
Debates etc.
Jones, Fiona, Points of order (19.04.99) 572
Questions
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Church Commissioners 407–8w

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate
153w
Manpower 149w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benefits Agency Medical Service
Contracts 277w

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 26, (19.04.99) 579–80, 589–90, 607–9, 661
Questions
Business questions 1049–50

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Questions
Manchester Airport, Manchester Metrolink 16

Bercow, Mr John
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 234, 239, 284, 294
Excise duties (21.04.99) 920, 940, 942
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 703–4, 708, 713, 720
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 43–4, 55
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 977
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 415, 457
Questions
Ambassadors for British business, Public appointments 511w
BBC, Public appointments 1054–5
Bus services, Ministers 17
Business questions 379–80
Drug treatment and testing orders 892–3
EC budget 405w
EC common foreign and security policy, Disclosure of information 611w
EC working groups 238w
Economic and monetary union 1–2w, 247w, 727w
Economic and monetary union, Northern Ireland 359w
Economic and monetary union, Task forces 403w
EC Justice and Home Affairs Council 19w
Euro, Coinage 247w
Euro, Task forces 495w
European Central Bank, Pay 496–7w
European Commission, Expenditure 611w
European Commission, Political impartiality 2w
European Commission, Public appointments 403w
European Movement 2w
European Police Office 317w
Export controls, Electronic surveillance 566w
France, International cooperation 405w
Horizon project 399w
Kosovo, Warships 401w
KPMG, Cabinet Office 146w
Labour Liberal Democrats Joint Consultative Committee 340–1w
Legal profession, Public appointments 1042
MacShane, Denis, Le Monde Diplomatique 611w
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 560–1
Pinochet, Augusto 36w, 341w
Prodi, Romano 686–7
Schengen Agreement 258w
Transport, Working hours 67–8w
Treaty of Amsterdam 403w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 235w

Berlin Summit
506w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Debates, Points of order (15.04.99) 459

***Bermingham, Mr Gerald**—continued*
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 449, 451–2
Questions
Business questions 1049

Berry, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1068, 1085–90
Questions
Television, Disability aids 89w

Beta-interferon
Scotland 200–1w

Better Regulation Task Force
Small businesses 903–4

Biggleswade Hospital
269w, 528–9w, 539w

Biodiversity
Agriculture 391w

Biotechnology
445w, 600w

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
Grants 448–9w

Birds
Licensing 74w

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Debates etc.
Kosovo, Ministerial statements (13.04.99) 19–33
Questions
Advisory Committee on Pesticides 596–7w
Beef, Exports 902
Belfast Agreement 905–6
Better Regulation Task Force, Small businesses 903–4
Cabinet, Committees 596w
Cystic fibrosis, Prescriptions 380w
EC grants and loans 472w
EC Social Charter, Civil servants 402–3w
EC working groups 238w
Economic and monetary union 1–3w, 403–4w
Economic and monetary union, Task forces 403w
Electoral systems 238w
Ethnic groups, Prime Minister 238–9w
European Commission, Political impartiality 2w
European Commission, Public appointments 403w
European Movement 2w
Firearms 904
Genetically modified organisms 1w
Gibraltar 595w
Industrial diseases, Compensation 899
Kosovo, Armed conflict 899–902, 906–7
Kosovo, Refugees 907–8
Kosovo Liberation Army 595w
Lorries, Excise duties 904–5
Macedonia, Peace keeping operations 404w
Mahon, Alice, Serbia 905
Medical profession, Training 902–3
Members, Correspondence 404w
Nelson, Rosemary 2w
Official engagements 597w
Political Honours Scrutiny Committee 472w
Proportional representation 595w
Simpson, John, Kosovo 901–2
Skilled workers, Shortages 900
Spain, Foreign relations 305–6w
Strategic Communications Unit 306w

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**—continued*
10 Downing Street 306w
Tillery Valley Foods, Trade union recognition 905
Treaty of Amsterdam 403w
Visits abroad, Prime Minister 1w
Withholding tax 898–9

Blears, Ms Hazel
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 238, 243–4, 248, 314–5, 317–8
Questions
Business questions 1055
Motorcycles 550–1w

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Mortgages, Codes of practice (15.04.99) 460–4
Questions
A47 52w
European Commission 686–7
Farmers, Diversification 1036

***Blunkett, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for Education and Employment*
Questions
Visits abroad, Dept for Education and Employment 159w
Woodstead, Chris 382w

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 643–5
Questions
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 673w
Royal Armoured Corps 373w
Territorial Army 42w

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

***Boateng, Mr Paul**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Lawman, Stephen (21.04.99) 1023–6
Roads, Accidents (20.04.99) 820–2
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 412, 436, 450, 455–8
Questions
Arrests, Ethnic groups 15w
Charities, Fund raising 24–6w
Cleveland Police Authority, Inquiries 10–1w, 484w, 666w
Crime, Middlesbrough 486w
Crime prevention 10w
Criminal Records Bureau, Fees and charges 7w
Curfews, Children 8w
Demonstrations, Lorry drivers 483–4w
Domestic violence, Homicide 23w, 534w
Driving offences, Insurance 340w, 416w
Firearms, Compensation 16w
Firearms, Licensing 16w
Firearms, Theft 584–5w
Hillsborough Stadium Evidence Inquiry, Disclosure of information 486w
Medway Secure Training Centre 8–9w
National Family and Parenting Institute 482w
Offences against children, Prosecutions 26–7w
Perjury, Convictions 662w
Police 9w
Police, Efficiency scrutinies 9w
Police, Finance 7–8w
Police, Freemasonry 712w
Police, Training 14–5w
Police authorities, Public appointments 712w

***Boateng, Mr Paul**—continued*
Police Scientific Development Branch, Publications 486–8w
Prostitution, Advertising 669w
Rape, Administration of justice 662w
Rape crisis centres, Finance 22w
Road traffic offences, Probation and aftercare 11–2w
Scout Association, Vetting 585w
Skin piercing 482–3w

Bombings
Lockerbie 688–9

Borrow, Mr David
Debates etc.
Lawman, Stephen (21.04.99) 1021–3
Questions
Kosovo, Overseas aid 232w
Regional development agencies, North West region 53w

Boswell, Mr Tim
Questions
Interest rates 354–5
Jobcentres, Minimum wage 169–70w
Military intervention 36w
State earnings related pension scheme, Widowed people 460w

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Questions
Virdi, Gurpal, Disciplinary proceedings 488–9w

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 92–4
Questions
Tax burden 329–30w

Bournemouth
Council tax 226

Bovine somatotropin
Dairy products 220w

Bovine tuberculosis
292–3w
Disease control 320w, 392w, 672w, 674w

Boy Scouts' Association
see Scout Association

Bradley, Mr Peter
Questions
Government departments, Annual reports 531w
Social security benefits, Disabled 456w
Tax burden, Transport 328w
Terrorism 661–2w

Bradshaw, Mr Ben
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 645–8
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 993
Questions
Cycling 360

Brady, Mr Graham
Questions
Business questions 384, 1053–4
Cancer 652–4w
Demonstrations, Lorry drivers 483–4w
EC budget, Repayments 356
Farmers, Regulation 673w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 377w
Packaging, EC action 412–3w
Primary care groups, Councillors 424w
Public appointments, Cabinet Office 339w
Public appointments, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 634–7w
Public appointments, Dept for Education and Employment 382w
Public appointments, Dept for International Development 317–8w

Brady, Mr Graham*—*continued
Public appointments, Dept of Health 338w
Public appointments, Dept of Social Security 308–9w
Public appointments, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 300w
Public appointments, Dept of Trade and Industry 307w
Public appointments, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 383w
Public appointments, Home Office 655–6w
Public appointments, Lord Chancellor's Dept 340w
Public appointments, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 517w
Public appointments, Ministry of Defence 324w
Public appointments, Northern Ireland Office 360w
Public appointments, President of the Council 302–3w
Public appointments, Scottish Office 309–10w
Public appointments, Treasury 493w
Public appointments, Welsh Office 336w
Railways, Freight 4
Sale West Race Course estate 412w
South Africa, Elections 341w
Written questions, Cabinet Office 339w
Written questions, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 482w
Written questions, Dept for Education and Employment 343w
Written questions, Dept for International Development 317w
Written questions, Dept of Health 337w
Written questions, Dept of Social Security 308w
Written questions, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 301w
Written questions, Dept of Trade and Industry 307w
Written questions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 342w
Written questions, Home Office 316w
Written questions, Lord Chancellor's Dept 340w
Written questions, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 322w
Written questions, Ministry of Defence 324w
Written questions, Northern Ireland Office 306w
Written questions, President of the Council 302w
Written questions, Scottish Office 309w
Written questions, Treasury 335w
Written questions, Welsh Office 336w

Braille
Ballot papers 418w

Brake, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Railway stations, Disabled (14.04.99) 182
Sites of special scientific interest (14.04.99) 166–9, 171–2, 175
Questions
Arrests, Ethnic groups 15w
Building regulations, Environment protection 61w
Bus lanes 60w
Compulsorily detained mental patients 107w
Countryside, Access 58w
Exhaust emissions, Testing 408–9w
Health hazards, Riot control weapons 107w
Internal drainage boards 396w

Brake, Mr Tom*—*continued
London Regional Transport, Assets 475w
London Regional Transport, Project Prestige 60w
London Underground, Investment 620–1w
London Underground, Joint ventures 474w
London Underground, Standards 620w
Mentally ill, Community care 107w
Millennium Exhibition, Public transport 274w
Office of Water Services, Environment protection 58–9w
Parking, Planning 59w
Police, Training 14–5w
Water, Planning 61w
Water companies, Consumer protection 59w
Wild animals, Protection 61w
Winter fuel payments 117–8w

Brand, Dr Peter
Questions
Council housing, Smoke alarms 61–2w
Smoke alarms 15–6w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 600

Brazil
Genetically modified organisms 320w

Breast cancer
Scotland 202w
Screening 654w

Breast feeding
107–8w
Scotland 194–5w

Breed, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 998
Sites of special scientific interest (14.04.99) 161–5, 170

Brinton, Mrs Helen
Debates etc.
Sites of special scientific interest (14.04.99) 165–6, 173
Questions
Air pollution, Monitoring 409–10w
Alternative energy 94–5w, 330–1w
Breast feeding 107–8w
Breast feeding, Scotland 194–5w
Caesarean sections, Scotland 193w
Health hazards, Air pollution 540–1w
Maternity services, Scotland 193w
Mental patients, Restraint techniques 374w
Pigs 672w
Teenage pregnancy 246–7w

British citizenship
Ceremonies 485w
St Helena 693–4

British Indian Ocean Territory
Emigration 511w
Visits 511w

British Rail
67w

British Standards Institution
71–2w

Broadcasting
Parliament (14.04.99) 139–60

Brown, Rt Hon Gordon*, *Chancellor of the Exchequer
Questions
Contingency reserve 356
Debts written off, Developing countries 364–5
EC budget, Repayments 356–7
Economic situation 355

Brown, Rt Hon Gordon*—*continued
Income tax, Personal savings 355–6
Interest rates 354–5
Official engagements, Treasury 496w
Select committee reports, Treasury 122–3w
Withholding tax 357, 364–5

Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas*, *Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 976–7, 982–94, 996, 998–9
Questions
Animal welfare 1031–2
Animal welfare, France 1033
Common agricultural policy, Consumers 670–1w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 671–2w
EC Agriculture Council 291w
Ethnic groups, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 514w
Food, Exports 1032–3
Food, Import controls 1031
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 594w
Quarantine 670w
Quarantine, Guide dogs 219w
Strasbourg 224w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 319w

Brown, Mr Russell
Questions
Lockerbie, Bombings 688–9

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1120–5
Kosovo (19.04.99) 577–8
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 976
Questions
A30 704w
Chechnya, Granger Telecom 256–7w, 383–4w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 896

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 707, 713, 720, 730, 737–8, 741, 743, 766–77, 806
Oral question time intervention (22.04.99) 1044
Unemployment, Points of order (14.04.99) 227
Questions
Advisory services, Information technology 895
Barristers, Standards 1043–4
Business questions 380–1
Developing countries, Genetically modified organisms 211
Government departments, Correspondence 897–8
Nigeria, Foreign relations 509w
Prisons, Portland 418w
Taxation, Information technology 366
Visas 695

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 708, 724–32
Questions
Capital Modernisation Fund, Scotland 310w
Income tax, Personal savings 355–6
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 121w
Market research, Scottish Office 174–6w
Millennium compliance, Ministry of Defence 242–3w
Millennium compliance, NHS 271w

***Bruce, Mr Malcolm**—continued*
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 339–40w
Strategic Communications Unit 306w
Tax burden 121w
10 Downing Street 306w

Brumby Hospital Scunthorpe
268w

Buck, Ms Karen
Questions
Additional personal allowance 121–2w

Budget March 1999
495w, 588w
Equal opportunities 588w
Literacy 587w

Building and Property Group
Contracts 48–9w
Vetting 240w, 722w

Building regulations
480w
Environment protection 61w

Burden, Mr Richard
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 508w
Taxation, Motor vehicles 359

Burgon, Mr Colin
Questions
Employment Tribunals Service, Standards 366w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 238–9, 267–72, 285, 293
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 706, 747, 792

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 957
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 470–8, 480–1, 487, 496, 519, 533
Mobile homes (21.04.99) 849, 853–5
Sites of special scientific interest (14.04.99) 170–5
Questions
Countryside Agency 413w
Housing, Essex 260w
Rainsford School Chelmsford 444w
Sites of special scientific interest 11
Social security benefits, Abuse 556

Burstow, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 823–8, 843
Questions
Business questions 1055–6
Fares, Greater London 10
Health authorities, Investment 424w
Hospitals, Discharges 268w
Income tax, Pensioners 118–9w
Pesticides 413w
Polling stations, Access 418–9w
Television, Licensing 89w
Transport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 84w
Voting methods, Sight impaired 418w

Bus Employees' Superannuation Trust
58w, 119–20w

Bus Fuel Duty (Exemptions) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (16.04.99) 541, (23.04.99) 1210

Bus lanes
60w

Bus services
51w
Bedfordshire 76w
Clitheroe 13–4
Ministers 17
Passengers 17, 629–30w
Rural areas 13

Business
Alternative energy 332w
Euro 493w
Lancaster 219–20
Taxation 353–4

Business interests
Judges 30–2w
Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Expert Group 293w

Business plans
Home Office 420w

Business statements
371–84, 1045–57

Butler, Mrs Christine
Questions
Lorries 51–2w

***Byers, Rt Hon Stephen**, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry*
Questions
Arms trade, Export controls 552–3w
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Grants 448–9w
China 447w
EC grants and loans 367w
Employment Tribunals Service, Standards 366w
Gas fired power stations, Baglan Bay 268w
Genetically modified organisms, Departmental responsibilities 449w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 707w
Lobbying, Dept of Trade and Industry 367–8w
Public appointments, Dept of Trade and Industry 307w
Sainsbury of Turville, Lord, Peers' interests 446–8w
Single market action plan 613–4w
Trade, Environment protection 551–2w
Working hours, Dept of Trade and Industry 92w
Written questions, Dept of Trade and Industry 307w

Bypasses
544–5w

Cabinet
Committees 596w

Cabinet Joint Consultative Committee
see Labour Liberal Democrats Joint Consultative Committee

Cabinet Office
European Scrutiny Committee 148w
KPMG 146w
Public appointments 339w
Statistics 601–2w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 239–40w
Treaty of Amsterdam 146–7w
Written questions 339w

Cable, Mr Vincent
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 102–4
Questions
Arms trade, Export controls 455w, 552–3w, 612–3w
Child care tax credit 245w
Corporation tax 122w
Departmental coordination, Elderly 891–2

***Cable, Mr Vincent**—continued*
Extracurricular activities 524w
Health insurance, Age 331w
Heart diseases, Waiting lists 100–1w
Heathrow Airport, Public inquiries 69w
Millennium compliance, Financial institutions 357–8
Orange badge scheme 68–9w
Prisons, Recruitment 710–1w
Pupil exclusions 714w
Tax credit, Pensioners 118w
Viagra 527w
Water, Meters 475w
Welfare tax credits, Widowed people 460w
Working families tax credit 122w

***Caborn, Rt Hon Richard**, Minister for the Regions Regeneration and Planning, Dept of the Environment, Transport and the Regions*
Questions
Agriculture, Buildings 49w
Heathrow Airport, Public inquiries 69w
Regional development agencies, East Midlands 54w
Regional development agencies, Finance 545–6w
Regional development agencies, North West region 53w
Regional development agencies, Political activities 704–6w
Regional government, North East region 14
Regional planning and development 546w

CADW Welsh Historic Monuments
Standards 698w

Caesarean sections
Scotland 193w

Cambodia
Overseas aid 576w

Cameras
Speed limits 618w

Campbell, Mr Alan
Questions
Public records, Access 120w

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Questions
Genetically modified organisms, Food 673w

Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 588–91
Questions
Iraq 36w, 255–6w
Iraq, Peace keeping operations 323w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 680–1
Kosovo, War crimes 613w
Papua New Guinea 511w
Statistics, Cabinet Office 601–2w
Statistics, Dept for Education and Employment 713–4w
Statistics, Dept for International Development 577w
Statistics, Dept of Social Security 707–8w
Statistics, Home Office 582–3w
Statistics, Lord Chancellor's Dept 604w
Statistics, Northern Ireland Office 537–8w
Statistics, Treasury 726–7w
Statistics, Welsh Office 729w
Wild ducks, Pest control 410w

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Debates etc.
Business question time intervention (22.04.99) 1051

Campbell-Savours, Mr Dale
Questions
Business questions 373
EC budget, Repayments 357
Lorries, Excise duties 9

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Questions
Child minding, Scotland 196–7w

Cancer
248w, 652–4w
Alternative medicine 106w
Death rate 248–50w
EC countries 248–50w
Health services 104–7w
Information services 647–8w

Cancer Care Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
1R (14.04.99) 228–9

Cann, Mr Jamie
Questions
Regional government, Eastern region 62–4w

Cannabis
893–4

Capital allowances
Small businesses 427w

Capital Modernisation Fund
Scotland 310w

Capital punishment
Commonwealth 467w
Privy Council Office Judicial Committee 29w
USA 383w

Caplin, Mr Ivor
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 472, 484, 514, 524–7
Questions
Driving offences, Insurance 340w, 416w
Motor vehicles, Databases 69w
National carers' strategy 568

Car allowances
427w

Carbon dioxide
Pollution control 368–9w

Carers
Minimum wage 452w
Social security benefits 564

Caribbean
Bananas 96–7w
Overseas aid 232–3w

Cars
Engines 301w

Casale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 712
Kosovo (19.04.99) 636–8
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 901

Cash, Mr William
Questions
Jubilee 2000 215

Catering
Hospitals 530w
Millennium Exhibition 83–4w
Nursing homes 530w
Pigmeat 394w
Schools 168w

Cawsey, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 974, 1008–9

Censorship
Skyline College 253w

Census
Correspondence 676–7w
Disclosure of information 588–90w, 677w

Central Europe
Military exercises 371w

Centre for Defence Medicine
44w

Centre for Management and Policy Studies
147w

Certification
Seeds 518w

Cervical cancer
(16.04.99) 543–50

Chancellor of The Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel railway line
411w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Questions
Ascension Island, Fuels 256w
Economic and monetary union, Small businesses 327–8w
Falkland Islands, Aviation 42w, 405–6w
Farmers, Personal income 671w
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 143w
Further education, Headteachers 173w, 559w
Higher civil servants, Ethnic groups 600w
India 234–5w
Northern Ireland government 143–4w
Social security benefits, Abuse 458–9w
Wirral Metropolitan College 172w, 558–9w, 717–8w

Chapman, Sir Sydney
Questions
Genetically modified organisms 895–6
House of Commons, Alternative energy 28–9w
London Underground, Investment 12
Middle East, Peace negotiations 691
Social security benefits, Abuse 557

Charities
Fund raising 24–6w
Regulation 24–6w

Chartermark scheme
602w

Chaytor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1172–4
Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill, 2R adjourned (23.04.99) 1205–7
Sites of special scientific interest (14.04.99) 168–71
Questions
Construction, Company liquidations 3
Developing countries, Primary education 237–8w
Millennium Fund 83w
Overseas aid, Indonesia 387w
Serbia, Nuclear weapons 217
Taxation, Energy 361

Chechnya
Granger Telecom 256–7w, 383–4w

Cheltenham
Railway network 76w

Chemical Weapons Act 1996
Questions
267w

Child benefit
566–7

Child care tax credit
245w, 425w

Child Migrant Support Fund
529–30w

Child minding
Scotland 196–7w

Childbirth
334w

Children
Abuse 3w
Curfews 8w
Day care 160–1w, 459–60w
Drugs (19.04.99) 669–78
Football 376w
Hamilton 204w
Health 642–5w
Kidnapping (22.04.99) 1132–8
Maintenance 329w, 616–7w
Nutrition 642–5w
Poverty 244–5w, 459w, 567
Spectacles 538w

Children in care
104w, 113–4w
Ethnic groups 725w

Chile
695–7

China
447w
Human rights 36w

Chope, Mr Christopher
Questions
Al-Fayed, Mohammed, Hamilton, Neil 1044
Assisted areas 367w
Business questions 1050–1
EC grants and loans 366–7w
Education, Finance 255w
European Communities, Disclosure of information 148w
European Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet Office 148w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept for Education and Employment 381w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept for International Development 126–7w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept of Health 374–5w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 299–300w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept of Trade and Industry 505w
European Scrutiny Committee, Industrial Health and Safety 69w
European Scrutiny Committee, Treasury 494–5w
Food Standards Agency, Fees and charges 1037
Incapacity benefit, Availability for work 457w
Motor vehicles, EC action 450w
Trade promotion, Ministers 91–2w

Church Commissioners
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 407–8w

Cider
Excise duties 329w

Civil defence
Nuclear weapons 42w

Civil Procedure (Modification of Enactments) Order 1999
Debates etc.
(21.04.99) 1020

Civil proceedings
Legal aid scheme 533w

Civil servants
EC Social Charter 402–3w
Ethnic groups 338w
Wales 338w

Civil service agencies
Annual reports 38–40w, 531w

Clapham, Mr Michael
Questions
Industrial health and safety, Noise 282w

Clappison, Mr James
Questions
Deportation 578–9w, 668–9w
Illegal immigrants 6–7w
Immigrants, Crime 667w
Immigrants, Detainees 666–7w
Immigration, Appeals 667w
Immigration, Applications 666w, 670w
Immigration, Guarantees 670w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 485w, 663w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Administration 662w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Administrative delays 664–5w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Buildings 664–5w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Manpower 664w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Productivity 663w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Resignations 485–6w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Siemens Business Services 664w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Standards 485w, 663w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Telephone services 663w
Immigration controls, Manpower 10w
Pinochet, Augusto 419w
Political refugees, Voucher schemes 667–8w
Political refugees, Waterloo Station 670w
Political refugees, Yugoslavia 665w

Clark, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 32, (19.04.99) 597–9
Sites of special scientific interest (14.04.99) 164

Clark, Rt Hon Dr David
Questions
Skin piercing 482–3w

Clark, Dr Lynda
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 254–6, 262, 284–7, 292–3, 320

***Clarke, Mr Charles**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Drugs, Health education 559w
Environmental impact assessment, Dept for Education and Employment 556w
Extracurricular activities 524w
Gambling, Young people 524w
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Digital broadcasting 254w
Investment, Dept for Education and Employment 254w

***Clarke, Mr Charles**—continued*
National grid for learning, Finance 170–1w
People's panel 166w
Schools, Sportsgrounds 163w
Teachers' Pension Scheme Working Group 167w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 60–3
Kosovo (19.04.99) 581

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1061, 1068–9, 1076–80
Questions
Kosovo, EC aid 213

Class sizes
218–9, 345–9w, 381–2w
Primary education 436–44w
Reception classes 349–55w
Scotland 183w, 282w

Classification schemes
NHS 270–1w

Clegg, Lee
Legal costs 42–3w

Cleveland Police Authority
Inquiries 10–1w, 484w, 666w

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Housing, Gloucestershire (14.04.99) 192–3
Questions
Business questions 1052–3
Railways, Standards 54w

Clitheroe
Bus services 13–4

Closed circuit television
Employment 92w
Scotland 203–4w

Clothing
Armed forces 40–1w
VAT 588w

Clwyd, Ann
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 603–5
Questions
Business questions 1046–7
East Timor 685–6

Coaker Mr Vernon
Questions
Criminal Justice Act 1993 583w
Kosovo, War crimes 219

Coalfields Task Force
Regional aid 368–70

Cocaine
Drug seizures 580–1w

Codex Alimentarius Commission
294w

Coffey, Ms Ann
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1148–51, 1188–90

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 387, 392, 428–32
Questions
Animal experiments 19–21w
Arms trade, Export controls 260–2w
Economic Community of West African States, Arms trade 341–2w

***Cohen, Mr Harry**—continued*
Royal College of Midwives, Conferences 542w

Coinage
Euro 247w

Coleman, Mr Iain
Questions
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Croydon 710w
Lockerbie, Bombings 688
Police, Ethnic groups 21w
Racial violence, Hammersmith and Fulham 3w, 21–2w
Stop and search, Hammersmith and Fulham 21w

Collins, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1066, 1069, 1080–5

Colombia
(14.04.99) 198–206, 508w

Colvin, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 31
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 681

Commission of the European Communities
see European Commission

Commissioner for Public Appointments
see Public Appointments Commissioner

Committees
Cabinet 596w

Common agricultural policy
391w
Consumers 670–1w
Dairy farming 671w
Duchy of Lancaster 600w
Herefordshire 217w
Reform 593w, 671–2w
Sheep meat 217w
Staffordshire 217w
Sugar 217w
Wales 696w

Commonwealth
Capital punishment 467w

Community care
Mentally ill 107w

Community health councils
Wales 501w

Community Protection (Landfill) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
1R (13.04.99) 35–7

Company liquidations
Construction 3

Compulsorily detained mental patients
107w

Computer Millennium Non-Compliance (Contingency Plans) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (23.04.99) 1210

Computer viruses
Government departments 146w

Computers
Income tax 726w
Social Security Contributions Agency 591w

Conditional fee agreements
534w

Conditions of employment
326–7w
Developing countries 231w
Ministry of Defence Police 41–2w

Conflict of interests
Human Genetics Advisory Commission 449w

Connarty, Mr Michael
Questions
Developing countries, Microcredit programmes 234w
Gas fired power stations, Alton 455–6w
Inland waterways, Scotland 221

Connex Rail
Disabled 15, (14.04.99) 181–8

Conservation
Energy 80–1w, 625–7w
Hedges and ditches 63w

Conservative Party
Contributions 224

Constituencies
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 33w

Consultation papers
Dept for Education and Employment 714–5w
Home Office 417w

Consumer councils
263–7w

Consumer protection
Water companies 59w

Consumers
Common agricultural policy 670–1w

Contingency reserve
356

Contraceptives
424w, 648w

Contracts
Benefits Agency Medical Service 277w
Building and Property Group 48–9w

Contributions Agency
see Social Security Contributions Agency

Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction
(22.04.99) 1132–8

Convictions
Armed forces 40w
Perjury 662w

***Cook, Rt Hon Robin**, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 573–82
Questions
Berlin Summit 506w
Chile 695–7
Constituencies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 33w
Foreign relations, Devolution 728w
Government Communications Headquarters, Internet 34w
Immunity certificates 727w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 506w, 679–82
Lockerbie, Bombings 688–9
MacShane, Denis, Le Monde Diplomatique 611w
St Helena, British citizenship 693–4
Sierra Leone, Select committee reports 35–6w, 404w
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 404–5w
Written questions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 406w

Cooper, Ms Yvette
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 923
Questions
Pilot schemes, Dept of Health 97–100w

Cooperatives
Dairy farming 94w

Corbett, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1061
Questions
Children in care, Ethnic groups 725w
Political Honours Scrutiny Committee 472w
Social Exclusion Unit, Teenage pregnancy 702w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 578
Questions
Business questions 1052
Civil defence, Nuclear weapons 42w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Questions
Business questions 1056–7
Public appointments, Political impartiality 891

Cornwall
Education (21.04.99) 862–75
Health authorities 526–7w

Coroners
22w

Corporation tax
122w

Cotter, Mr Brian
Questions
Excise duties, Alcoholic drinks 616w
Information society initiative 453w
Internet, Trade 555w
Small Business Service, Operating costs 552w
Small businesses, Debts 453w
Smuggling, Alcoholic drinks 615w
Tax exemption certificates 122w
Taxation, Construction 365–6

Council housing
Elderly 478w
Rents 64–5w
Smoke alarms 61–2w

Council tax
50w, 70–1w, 476w
Bournemouth 226

Council tax benefits
150w
Elderly 415w

Council tax capping
50–1w, 410w
Wales 697–8w

Councillors
Primary care groups 424w

Countryside
Access 53w, 58w

Countryside Agency
413w, 630w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 723, 747, 754
Questions
Endowment mortgages 252w
Exchange rates 368
Fertility, Prescription drugs 101–3w

***Cousins, Mr Jim** – continued*
Income support 278w
Occupational pensions, Widowed people 464–5w
Pensioners, Income support 277–8w
Pensions 279w
Pensions, Advisory services 279w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Asbestos, Imports 96w
Commonwealth, Capital punishment 467w
Developing countries, Debts written off 420–1w
EC common foreign and security policy 563–4w
Fares, Concessions 70w
Gambling, Young people 524w
Greece, Cultural relations 35w
Magistrates' courts 29w
New deal schemes, Greater London 163–4w
Priority routes, Wandsworth 64w
Privy Council Office Judicial Committee, Capital punishment 29w
Schools, Sportsgrounds 163w
Set-aside schemes 515w
Social security benefits, Disabled 158w
Unemployment 335w
Work permits 431w

***Cranston, Mr Ross**, Solicitor-General*
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 320–5
Questions
Acquittals 1042–3
Al-Fayed, Mohammed, Hamilton, Neil 1044
Barristers, Standards 1043–4
Crown Prosecution Service 608–10w, 1040–1
Crown Prosecution Service, Email 1041
Homicide, Criminal proceedings 610–1w
Legal profession, Public appointments 1042
Pinochet, Augusto 594–5w
Serious Fraud Office 609w

Crausby, Mr David
Questions
Bus services, Passengers 17

Credit unions
120w
Shares 619–20w

Crime
Immigrants 667w
Middlesbrough 486w

Crime prevention
10w
Scotland 207–8w
Treasury 244w

Crimes of violence
Northern Ireland 144w, 536–7w

Criminal Cases Review Commission
Kamara, John 22w

Criminal injuries compensation scheme
(22.04.99) 1131

Criminal investigation
Bahamas (14.04.99) 346–52

Criminal Justice Act 1993
Questions
583w

Criminal proceedings
Homicide 610–1w
Legal aid scheme 533w
Scotland 190w

Criminal Records Bureau
Fees and charges 7w

Crops
Genetically modified organisms 56w, 216–7w, 229w, 259w, 301–2w, 321w, 368w, 394–6w, 411w, 550w, 594w, 673w, 702–4w, 896

Crosby
Driving tests 474w

Crown Prosecution Service
397–8w, 608–10w, 1040–1
Disclosure of information 4w
Email 1041
Ethnic groups 3w
Freemasonry 4w, 699w

Croydon
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 710w

Cryer, Mrs Ann
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 690

Cryer, Mr John
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 837–9
Questions
Reduced earnings allowance, Appeals 639w

Cuba
Human rights 209–10
Overseas aid 209
Politics and government 210

Cultural relations
Greece 35w

Cunliffe, Mr Lawrence
Questions
Ragwort, Weed control 220w

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack, Minister for the Cabinet Office
Questions
Biotechnology 600w
Cannabis 893–4
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 338w
Drug treatment and testing orders 892–3
Drugs, Abuse 599w
Drugs, Health education 894
Drugs, Prosecutions 892–3
Duchy of Lancaster, Common agricultural policy 600w
Environmental impact assessment, Northern Ireland Office 145w
Genetically modified organisms 895–6
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 896
Genetically modified organisms, Food 239w, 297w, 322w, 896
Government departments, Public opinion 599w
Lancaster 891
Methadone 893
Ministerial policy advisors 897
Ministerial policy advisors, Pay 339–40w
"Modernising Government White Paper" 601w
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 601w, 889
Public appointments, Cabinet Office 339w
Public appointments, Political impartiality 891
Public Appointments Commissioner, Recruitment 890–1
Public inquiries, Administrative delays 338–9w
Public service 145–6w
Social Exclusion Unit, Teenage pregnancy 702w

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack*—*continued
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Cabinet Office 239–40w
Written questions, Cabinet Office 339w

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 704
Questions
Cancer, Alternative medicine 106w
Cancer, Health services 106–7w
Council housing, Elderly 478w
Lifelong education 522w
Ophthalmic services, Elderly 531w
Pensioners, Fuel poverty 477–8w
Pensioners, Health services 530–1w
Pensioners, Income support 521w
Pensioners, Social security benefits 521–2w
University for Industry, Environment protection 168–9w

Cunningham, Ms Roseanna
Debates etc.
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 393
Questions
Administration of justice, Scotland 189–90w
Criminal proceedings, Scotland 190w
Taxation, Environment protection 726w

Curfews
Children 8w

Curriculum
Science 165w

Curry, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 1001–3

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Questions
Driving tests, Crosby 474w
Millennium Exhibition, Engineering 274w

Cycleways
60w

Cycling
360

Cystic fibrosis
Prescriptions 380w

Dafis, Mr Cynog
Questions
Fares, Wales 502–3w
Teachers, Wales 285w

Dairy farming
Common agricultural policy 671w
Cooperatives 94w

Dairy Industry Federation
220w

Dairy products
Bovine somatotropin 220w
New Zealand 295–6w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 27–8, (19.04.99) 574, 586, 598, 624–6, 668
Kosovo, Points of order (16.04.99) 490
Lockerbie, Points of order (20.04.99) 697–8
Members' interests, Points of order (21.04.99) 909
Military Actions Against Iraq (Parliamentary Approval) Bill, Points of order (16.04.99) 541
Prime Minister, Points of order (13.04.99) 34

Dalyell, Mr Tam*—*continued
Sites of special scientific interest (14.04.99) 161
Speeches, Points of order (22.04.99) 1058
Questions
Bees, Horticulture 674w
Biotechnology 600w
Business questions 376–7, 1048
Contingency reserve 356
Export credit guarantees, Iraq 92–3w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 896
Housing benefit, Mature students 465w
Iraq, Peace keeping operations 508w
Kosovo Liberation Army 595w
War pensions, Hearing impaired 307–8w
Water supply 70w
Wellcome Trust, Grants 450w

Darling, Rt Hon Alistair, Secretary of State for Social Security
Questions
Disability living allowance 461w
Pensions 551–2
Select committee reports, Social Security Select Committee 157w
Social security benefits, Abuse 556–8
Social security benefits, Disabled 456w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Computers 591w

Darvill, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 310–3

Databases
Motor vehicles 69w

Davey, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 788–94
Questions
Economic and monetary union 327w
Economic and monetary union, Exchange rates 368

Davey, Mrs Valerie
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1157–9, 1191
Questions
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Uranium 43–4w
Kosovo, Uranium 43w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Questions
Kvaerner Govan, Shipbuilding 218

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 252–6
Questions
Economic and monetary union, Task forces 500–1w
Economic and monetary union, Wales 728w

Davies, Mr Geraint
Questions
Economic and monetary union, Small businesses 367

Davies, Nicholas
Injunctions 373–4w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 835–7
Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, Money res (14.04.99) 333–7, 340
Questions
Pensions 552

Davis, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 144–50
Questions
Food, Safety 672–3w

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1143, 1151–6
Mobile homes (21.04.99) 845–51, 859–60
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 389, 400, 405–8, 420
Questions
Lancaster 891
Lancaster, Business 219–20

Day, Mr Stephen
Questions
Manchester Airport, Roads 16–7

Day care
Children 160–1w, 459–60w

Dean, Mrs Janet
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 1003–4
Questions
Meat products, Waste disposal 674w

Death
Mental patients 108–9w
Prisoners 23–4w

Death rate
Cancer 248–50w
Wales 498w

Debts
Small businesses 453w

Debts written off
Developing countries 214–6, 236w, 325w, 364–5, 420–1w
Health authorities 129–33w

Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency
Standards 40w

Defence Codification Agency
Standards 40w

Defence Council
Disclosure of information 471–2w

Defence equipment
Gifts and endowments 241–2w

Defence Estate Organisation
632w

Defence Export Services Organisation
724w

Demonstrations
Lorry drivers 483–4w
Parliament Square 27–8w

***Denham, Mr John**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 116–20
Prescription drugs (13.04.99) 133–8
Questions
Aricept 530w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Accident and emergency departments 422–3w
Biggleswade Hospital 269w, 528–9w, 539w
Brumby Hospital Scunthorpe 268w
Dental services, Wyre Forest 725w
Fertility, Prescription drugs 101–3w
Guy's and St Thomas NHS Trust, Public appointments 375–6w
Health authorities, Devon 526–7w
Health services, Armed forces 114w

***Denham, Mr John**—continued*
Health services, Standards 539w
Heart diseases, Waiting lists 100–1w, 527–8w
Hospitals, Catering 530w
Hospitals, Discharges 268w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 531w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 103–4w
Intensive care, Hampshire 270w
Lamotrigine 268–9w, 423–4w
Medical records 652w
Methadone 377w
Millennium compliance, NHS 271w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 544w
Negligence 529w
Neurology, Standards 529w
NHS, Classification schemes 270–1w
NHS, Income 641w
NHS Direct, Back pain 652w
NHS trusts, Public appointments 377w
Nurses, Training 422w, 527w
Ophthalmic services, Elderly 531w
Pharmacy, Pay 114w
Pilot schemes, Dept of Health 97–100w
Primary care groups, Councillors 424w
Public appointments, Dept of Health 338w
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Radiotherapy 108w
Spectacles, Children 538w
Speech therapy, Pay 113w
Viagra 527w

Dental services
Wales 137w, 430w
Wyre Forest 725w

Departmental coordination
Elderly 891–2

Departmental responsibilities
Genetically modified organisms 449w, 594w

Deployment
Air force 723–4w
Armed forces 632–3w, 722w
Army 724w
Navy 723w
Royal Auxiliary Air Force 723w

Deportation
578–9w, 668–9w

Depressive illnesses
650w
Wales 288w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Advisory bodies 84–7w
EC budget 84w
Environmental impact assessment 89w
Ethnic groups 305w
Lobbying 88w
Public appointments 634–7w
Small businesses 81–3w
Transport 84w
Treaty of Amsterdam 481–2w
Visits abroad 577w
Written questions 482w

Dept for Education and Employment
Advisory bodies 163w
Consultation papers 714–5w
Environmental impact assessment 556w
European Scrutiny Committee 381w
Investment 254w
Lobbying 170w
Manpower 254–5w, 558w
Proof of identity 165–6w
Public appointments 382w
Statistics 713–4w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 430–1w
Treaty of Amsterdam 381w
USA 558w

***Dept for Education and Employment**—continued*
Visits abroad 159w
Written questions 343w

Dept for International Development
Environmental impact assessment 124w
European Scrutiny Committee 126–7w
Lobbying 123–4w
Public appointments 317–8w
Statistics 577w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 125–6w
Treaty of Amsterdam 127–8w
USAID 576w
Written questions 317w

Dept of Health
Advisory bodies 271w, 641–2w
European Scrutiny Committee 374–5w
Lobbying 108w
Pilot schemes 97–100w
Public appointments 338w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 647w
Treaty of Amsterdam 269w
Written questions 337w

Dept of Social Security
Complaints 384w
Disabled 385w
Environmental impact assessment 464w
Public appointments 308–9w
Standards 384w
Statistics 707–8w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 521w
Treaty of Amsterdam 152w
USA 707w
Written questions 308w

Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Advisory bodies 57–8w, 80w
Buildings 600w
Environmental impact assessment 66w
European Scrutiny Committee 299–300w
GJW Government Relations 415w
KPMG 625w
Public appointments 300w
Secondment 546–7w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 408w
Treaty of Amsterdam 75w
Visits abroad 57w
Written questions 301w

Dept of Trade and Industry
European Scrutiny Committee 505w
Lobbying 367–8w
Public appointments 307w
Sainsbury of Turville, Lord 707w
Secondment 450–1w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 551w
USA 503w
Working hours 92w
Written questions 307w

Derbyshire
School meals 167–8w
Sure start programme 164w

Deregulation Select Committee
(16.04.99) 54

Detention
Immigrants 666–7w

Developing countries
Bananas 209
Conditions of employment 231w
Debts written off 214–6, 236w, 325w, 364–5, 420–1w
Genetically modified organisms 210–2
Microcredit programmes 234w
Overseas trade 208–9
Primary education 237–8w
Security 236–7w
Tobacco 337w

***Developing countries**—continued*
Trade 235w

Devolution
Foreign relations 728w

Devon
Health authorities 526–7w

***Dewar, Rt Hon Donald**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
Advertising, Scottish Office 283–4w
Advisory bodies, Scottish Office 524–5w
Capital Modernisation Fund, Scotland 310w
Foreign investment in UK, Glasgow 199–200w
New Opportunities Fund, Correspondence 397w
Overseas trade, Scotland 176–7w
Performance appraisal, Scottish Office 185–8w
Proof of identity, Scottish Office 190w
Public appointments, Scottish Office 309–10w
Scottish Parliament, Buildings 184w
Small businesses, Scottish Office 183w
Wood, Scotland 183–4w
Written questions, Scottish Office 309w

Diesel fuel
Excise duties 115–6w, 119w, 325w
VAT 115–6w

Dietary supplements
293–4w
Retail trade 321w

Digital broadcasting
General Certificate of Secondary Education 254w

Digital Television Broadcasting Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
1R (21.04.99) 910–4

Diplomatic relations
Libyan Arab Republic 511–2w

Director General of Water Services
see Office of Water Services

Director of Public Prosecutions
see Crown Prosecution Service

Directors
Pay 306–7w

Disability aids
Television 89w

Disability living allowance
461–2w
Eltham 157–8w
Hearing impaired 462–4w
Mentally ill 465–6w

Disability Rights Commission Bill (HL) 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R and money res* (22.04.99) 1060–130

Disabled
Connex Rail 15, (14.04.99) 181–8
Dept of Social Security 385w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 380w
Public transport 52w
Railway stations (14.04.99) 181–8
Social security benefits 158w, 456w, 555, 566, 709–10w
Sports 87w

Disaster relief
Kosovo 471w
Non-governmental organisations 471w

Disciplinary proceedings
European Commission 509w
Virdi, Gurpal 488–9w

Disease control
Bovine tuberculosis 320w, 392w, 672w, 674w

Diseases
Urinary system 422w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 247–9, 257, 263, 267, 301–4
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1187–91
Questions
Barristers 534w, 675w
Barristers, Limited liability 429w
Chartermark scheme 602w
Coroners 22w
Crown Prosecution Service, Ethnic groups 3w
Developing countries, Security 236–7w
Employment tribunals 32–3w
Ethnic groups, Attorney General 3w
Hedges and ditches, Conservation 63w
Judges, Business interests 30–2w
Judiciary, Public appointments 33w
Legal profession 428w
Legal profession, Complaints 428w
Social security appeal tribunals, Public appointments 148–9w
Social security benefits, Disabled 709–10w
Social Security Commissioners 32w
Solicitors, Limited liability 533w
War pensions 562w, 632w
Water charges 624–5w

Disposable syringes
Prisons 23w

***Dobson, Rt Hon Frank**, Secretary of State for Health*
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 38–47, 54, 56

Doctors
Hygiene 113w

Dolphins
477w

Domestic violence
Homicide 23w, 534w

Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 66, 77–9

Double glazing
Regulation 3

Drew, Mr David
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 980, 990, 999–1001
Mobile homes (21.04.99) 857
Questions
Animal welfare 1032
Common agricultural policy, Reform 671–2w
Dairy products, New Zealand 295–6w
East Timor 36w
Food Standards Agency 292w
Food Standards Agency, Farmers 291–2w, 394w
House of Commons, Alternative energy 28–9w
Indonesia, Armed forces 37w
Millennium Exhibition, Environment protection 272–3w
Veterinary medicine, Drugs 295w

***Drew, Mr David**—continued*
Village schools 173w

Driving offences
Insurance 340w, 416w

Driving tests
Crosby 474w

Drown, Ms Julia
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 104–6
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 386, 411, 425, 451
Questions
Developing countries, Debts written off 215–6, 325w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 216w, 229w
Genetically modified organisms, Maize 515–6w
Organic farming 445w
Speed limits, Cameras 618w

Drug seizures
Amphetamines 581w
Cocaine 580–1w
Heroin 580–1w
Methyl amphetamines 579–80w

Drug treatment and testing orders
892–3
Scotland 202w

Drug treatment centres
Scotland 202w

Drugs
Abuse 599w
Children (19.04.99) 669–78
Health education 559w, 894
Licensing 95–6w, 109w
Mentally ill 696–7w
Navy 370w
Prisons 203w
Prosecutions 892–3
Veterinary medicine 295w

Drunkenness
Shipping 63–4w

Duchy of Lancaster
Common agricultural policy 600w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1156–7, 1175, 1180
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 65, 81, 120
Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill, 2R adjourned (23.04.99) 1206–8

Duncan Smith, Mr Iain
Questions
Complaints, Dept of Social Security 384w
Disabled, Dept of Social Security 385w
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 554
Pensions 385–6w
Select committee reports, Social Security Select Committee 157w
Select committee reports, Treasury 122–3w
Social security benefits 561
Standards, Dept of Social Security 384w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Colombia (14.04.99) 205
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 49
Kosovo (19.04.99) 592–3
Questions
Railtrack, Investment 4–5

Duty solicitors
676w

***Eagle, Angela**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Debates etc.
Social security, Lone parents (23.04.99) 1214–6
Questions
Child benefit 566–7
Children, Day care 459–60w
Children, Poverty 459w, 567
Environmental impact assessment, Dept of Social Security 464w
Habitual residence test 559–60
Housing benefit 562
Housing benefit, Mature students 465w
Income support 278w
Lone parents, Education 567
Lone parents, Employment 461w
Lone parents, Income support 151w
Occupational pensions, Widowed people 464–5w
Pensioners, Income support 277–8w
Reduced earnings allowance, Appeals 639w
Social Fund, Applications 565–6
Social security, EC action 553
Social security appeal tribunals, Public appointments 148–9w
Social security benefits, Personal savings 278–9w
Social security benefits, Post offices 153–4w, 639–40w
Social security benefits, Widowed people 151–2w, 154–5w, 280–1w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept of Social Security 521w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept of Social Security 152w
Welfare tax credits, Widowed people 460w
Widowed parents' allowance 281–2w
Winter fuel payments 563–4, 591–2w

East Midlands
Regional development agencies 54w

East Midlands Electricity
Correspondence 504w

East Timor
36w, 684–6

Eastern region
Regional government 62–4w

EC action
Administration of justice 12–3w, 510w
Arms trade 407w
Aviation (22.04.99) 1130
Electronic surveillance 418w
Lead 54w
Motor vehicles 450w
Packaging 412–3w
Satellites 12w
Social security 553

EC Agriculture Council
291w

EC aid
233w
European Commission 213–4
Kosovo 213–4

EC budget
405w
Contributions 251–2w, 333–4w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 84w
Repayments 356–7

EC Commission
see European Commission

EC common foreign and security policy
563–4w
Disclosure of information 611w

EC Consumer Affairs Council
452–3w

EC countries
Cancer 248–50w
Excise duties 618–9w

EC Draft 8582/97
(22.04.99) 1130

EC enlargement
682–4
Agenda 2000 507w

EC Environment Council
625w

EC external relations
Mediterranean region 127w

EC external trade
Bananas 96–7w, 319w, 504–5w

EC Finance Council
119w, 618w

EC Fisheries Council
221w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
342w

EC grants and loans
366–7w, 472w
Scotland 208–10w, 570–1w
Scottish Office 197–8w
Wales 501w

EC institutions
507w
Reform 509w

EC law
Inland waterways 57w
Working hours 453–4w

EC Scientific Committee for Food
295w
Food Advisory Committee 221w

EC Social Charter
Civil servants 402–3w

EC working groups
238w

Economic and monetary union
1–3w, 247w, 327w, 403–4w, 499w, 727w
Exchange rates 118w, 368
Northern Ireland 359w
Referendums 327w
Small businesses 327–8w, 367
Task forces 403w, 500–1w
Wales 500–1w, 728w

Economic Community of West African States
Arms trade 341–2w

Economic situation
353, 355

Edexcel Foundation
171–2w

Education
Cornwall (21.04.99) 862–75
Equipment 177w
Expenditure 162w, 343w
Finance 255w, 678–82w, (21.04.99) 862–75
International Monetary Fund 232w
Lincolnshire 220
Lone parents 567
Middlesbrough 164w
Overseas aid 235–6w
Scotland 177w
Temporary immigrants 254w
World Bank 232w

Education action zones
435w

Education action zones*—*continued
Government departments 435–6w

Educational visits
Millennium Exhibition 273–4w, 305w
Museums and galleries 81w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 498, 520–2
Questions
A449, Noise 728w
Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment 623–4w
Business questions 382
EC grants and loans, Wales 501w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 550w
Genetically modified organisms, Monmouthshire 49–50w, 477w
Slaughterhouses, Monmouthshire 1035
Squash 578w

Efficiency scrutinies
Police 9w

Efford, Mr Clive
Questions
Disability living allowance, Eltham 157–8w
Kidney patients 650–2w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Attorney General 397w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Cabinet Office 239–40w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Church Commissioners 407–8w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept for Education and Employment 430–1w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept for International Development 125–6w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept of Health 647w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept of Social Security 521w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 408w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept of Trade and Industry 551w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 510–1w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Home Office 416w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 391w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Ministry of Defence 325w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Northern Ireland Office 467–9w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, President of the Council 466–7w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Scottish Office 366w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Treasury 428w, 497w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Welsh Office 597w

EH101 helicopters
47w

Elderly
Council housing 478w
Council tax benefits 415w
Departmental coordination 891–2
Ophthalmic services 531w

Elections
Local government 583–4w
South Africa 341w

Electoral systems
238w

Electricity generation
St Helena 38w

Electrification
Railway track 73w

Electronic equipment
Industrial health and safety 478–9w

Electronic surveillance
EC action 418w
Export controls 566w

Electronic warfare
Wellington Barracks 561w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 770, 794–7
Questions
Kamara, John, Criminal Cases Review Commission 22w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 508w
Regional planning and development 546w

Eltham
Disability living allowance 157–8w

Email
Crown Prosecution Service 1041

Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Questions
Health authorities, Devon 526–7w

Emigration
British Indian Ocean Territory 511w

Employment
Closed circuit television 92w
Lone parents 461w
Pay 332w

Employment action zones
435w

Employment agencies
Nannies 93w

Employment schemes
Older workers 556w

Employment tribunals
32–3w

Employment Tribunals Service
Standards 366w

Endowment mortgages
252w

Energy
Conservation 80–1w, 625–7w
Taxation 361–2

Engineering
Millennium Exhibition 274w

Engines
Cars 301w

English Nature
see Nature Conservancy Council for England

English Sports Council
National Lottery 89–90w

Ennis, Mr Jeff
Questions
Millennium compliance, Offshore industry 553–5w

Environment protection
692–3
Building regulations 61w
Lorries 7–8
Millennium Exhibition 272–3w
Office of Water Services 58–9w
Taxation 726w

Environment protection*—*continued
Tipping of waste (13.04.99) 35–7
Trade 551–2w
University for Industry 168–9w

Environmental health
People's panel 889–90

Environmental impact assessment
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 89w
Dept for Education and Employment 556w
Dept for International Development 124w
Dept of Social Security 464w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 66w
Home Office 415w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 30w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 222–3w
Ministry of Defence 42w
Northern Ireland Office 145w, 276w
Scottish Office 195w
Treasury 490w, 586w
Welsh Office 135–6w

Equal opportunities
Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99 674–5w
Budget March 1999 588w
Northern Ireland 364–5w

Essex
Housing 260w
Prisons 317w

Ethics
Local government 53w

Ethnic groups
386w
Arrests 15w
Attorney General 3w
Children in care 725w
Civil servants 338w
Crown Prosecution Service 3w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 305w
Higher civil servants 600w
Home Office 4–5w
Mental health services 287w, 543w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Foods 514w
Northern Ireland Office 138–9w
Police 21w, 198–9w
Prime Minister 238–9w
Teachers 162–3w

EU Justice and Home Affairs Council
12–3w, 19w, 258–9w
Administrative delays 583w

Euro
Bank notes 494w
Business 493w
Coinage 247w
Northern Ireland 143w
Task forces 495w
Taxation 588w

European Central Bank
Pay 496–7w

European Commission
686–8
Disciplinary proceedings 509w
EC aid 213–4
Expenditure 611w
Political impartiality 2w
Public appointments 403w
Resignations 233w

European Communities
see also EC *and* EU headings
Disclosure of information 148w

European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993
Debates etc.
(22.04.99) 1131

European Court of Human Rights
Ministry of Defence 41w

European Legislation Select Committee
275w

European Movement
2w

European Parliament elections
(15.04.99) 459
Gibraltar 569w

European Parliamentary Elections Regulations 1999
Debates etc.
(15.04.99) 459

European Police Office
317w

European Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Office 148w
Dept for Education and Employment 381w
Dept for International Development 126–7w
Dept of Health 374–5w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 299–300w
Dept of Trade and Industry 505w
Industrial health and safety 69w
Treasury 494–5w

Evans, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 982
Questions
Bus services, Clitheroe 13–4
Business questions 381–2
Economic and monetary union, Small businesses 367
Government departments, Internet 898
Overseas aid 212–3

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Questions
Class sizes, Scotland 183w
Excise duties, Fuels 245–6w, 331w
Mortgages, Repossession orders 177–82w
Primary education, Scotland 182–3w
Public expenditure, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 34w

Exchange rates
368
Economic and monetary union 118w, 368
Mark 251w

Excise duties
Alcoholic drinks 616w, 618–9w
Cider 329w
Diesel fuel 115–6w, 119w, 325w
EC countries 618–9w
Fuels 245–6w, 299w, 331w, 586w
Lorries 7–10, 49w, 52–3w, 221–2, 335–6w, 359–61, 427w, 547–8w, 904–5
Motor vehicles 492–3w, 545w
Opposition days (21.04.99) 915–73
Petrol 115w, 118w
Tobacco 492w

Exercise Dimming Sun
722w

Exhaust emissions
409w, 412w
Testing 408–9w

Export controls
Animal products 392w
Arms trade 34w, 123w, 260–2w, 455w, 552–3w, 612–3w

***Export controls**—continued*
Baton rounds 456w
Electronic surveillance 566w
Riot control weapons 456w

Export credit guarantees
552w
Algeria 553w
Angola 94w
Iraq 92–3w
Jordan 553w

Exports
Beef 902
Food 1032–3
Sheep 1036

Exservicemen
Incapacity benefit 401–2w
Injuries 324w
Mental health 324w

Extracurricular activities
524w

Fabricant, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Digital Television Broadcasting Bill, 1R (21.04.99) 912–4
Excise duties (21.04.99) 922, 926
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 470, 473–4, 478, 480, 483, 485, 487, 494, 496, 506, 513–20, 526–7
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 40, 57, 109–12
Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, Money res (14.04.99) 335–6, 339, 342
Questions
Cuba, Overseas aid 209
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 889

"Fairer Faster Firmer White Paper"
16w

Falkland Islands
Aviation 42w, 405–6w
Marine animals 693

Fallon, Mr Michael
Questions
Gift aid 332–3w
Interpol, Arrest warrants 5w
Postal rates 96w
Postal workers, Vacancies 253w
Roads, Noise 72–3w

Fares
Concessions 5–6, 10, 70w
Greater London 10
London Underground 12
Wales 502–3w

Farmers
see also Agriculture
Diversification 1035–6
Food Standards Agency 291–2w, 394w
Personal income 671w
Regulation 673w

***Fatchett, Rt Hon Derek**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Ambassadors for British business, Public appointments 511w
British Indian Ocean Territory, Emigration 511w
British Indian Ocean Territory, Visits 511w
China, Human rights 36w
East Timor 36w
France, Immigration controls 37w
Greece, Cultural relations 35w
India, Visas 37w
Indonesia, Armed forces 37w

***Fatchett, Rt Hon Derek**—continued*
Iraq 36w, 255–6w
Iraq, Sanctions 509w
Japan, Foreign investment in UK 513w
Libyan Arab Republic, Diplomatic relations 511–2w
Lobbying, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 34w
Newspaper press, Prime Minister 513w
Papua New Guinea 511w
Public expenditure, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 34w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 510–1w
Visas 37w

Fearn, Mr Ronnie
Debates etc.
Mobile homes (21.04.99) 845
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 826
Questions
Cars, Engines 301w
Children, Health 642–5w
Motor vehicles, Licensing 408w
Motorcycles 259–60w

Federal Trust
2w

Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre
17–9w

Females
Swaziland 127w
Taxation 329w

Fertility
Prescription drugs 101–3w

Field, Rt Hon Frank
Questions
Benefit Fraud Inspectorate 153w
Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, Manpower 149w
Childbirth 334w
Friendly societies 619w
Hillsborough Stadium Evidence Inquiry, Disclosure of information 486w
National insurance, Fraud 586–7w
New deal for young people 170w, 432–4w, 677–8w, 718w
New deal for young people, Qualifications 170w
New deal for young people, Single benefit gateway 523w, 677–8w
New deal for young people, Vocational training 255w
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 156–7w
Pensions 151w
Social security benefits, Abuse 276–7w, 459w, 520–1w, 708–9w
Social security benefits, Post offices 153–4w, 639–40w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Performance related pay 708w
State earnings related pension scheme 150w
Unemployment 247–8w

Fifteen minutes rule
Rulings and statements (14.04.99) 230

Finance Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R (20.04.99) 703–816

Financial institutions
Millennium compliance 357–8

Financial services
Regulation 330w

Financial Services and Markets Bill (Draft)
Questions
252w

Financial Services Authority
490w

Finucane, Patrick
Homicide 470w

Fire engines
661w

Firearms
904
Compensation 16w
Licensing 16w
Northern Ireland 359–60w, 606–8w, 721–2w
Theft 584–5w
Training 585w, 631w

First North Western Trains
Standards 628–9w

Fish diseases
Scotland 572–3w

Fisheries
674w, 1030
Fees and charges 672w
Fleetwood 1029
Irish Sea 1029–30
Scotland 215–6w

Fishery agreements
Africa 517w
Mauritania 517w

Fishing
Rivers 518–9w
Scotland 574w, 701–2w

Fishing catches
Log books 222w

Fishing vessels
220w
Inspections 222w
Prosecutions 229w
Regulation 296w
Satellites 221–2w
Scotland 229w

Fitzpatrick, Jim
Questions
Child benefit 566–7
Council tax capping 50–1w

Fleetwood
Fisheries 1029

Fletcher, Yvonne
688–9

Flight, Mr Howard
Questions
Council tax 50w
Individual savings accounts 363–4
Pensions 563
Withholding tax 326w

Flint, Caroline
Debates etc.
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 412–7

Flood control
Great Yarmouth 1027
Leicestershire 1028
River Derwent 593w, 1027–8

Flynn, Paul
Debates etc.
Drugs, Children (19.04.99) 674
Mortgages, Codes of practice (15.04.99) 461, 466–7

Flynn, Paul—*continued*
Questions
Breast cancer, Screening 654w
Business questions 375–6, 1053
Cannabis 893–4
Defence Export Services Organisation 724w
Drug seizures, Amphetamines 581w
Drug seizures, Cocaine 580–1w
Drug seizures, Methyl amphetamines 579–80w
Drugs, Abuse 599w
Export credit guarantees, Jordan 553w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Administrative delays 6w
Lobbying, Welsh Office 698w
Methadone 377w
National Assembly for Wales, Pay 286w
National Insurance Fund 325w
Pensioners, Personal income 640w
Prisoners, Infectious diseases 23w
Prisons, Disposable syringes 23w
Rape crisis centres, Finance 22w
State earnings related pension scheme 149–50w
Swaziland, Females 127w

Food
Army 562w
Exports 1032–3
Genetically modified organisms 55–6w, 83–4w, 221w, 239w, 297w, 322w, 394w, 673w, 707w, 896
Import controls 1031
Prices 593w
Safety 320w, 672–3w, 1033–4

Food Advisory Committee
220w, 295w
EC Scientific Committee for Food 221w

Food and Agriculture Organisation
Scottish Office 572w

Food poisoning
652w

Food Standards Agency
218w, 292w, 672w, 1038–9
Farmers 291–2w, 394w
Fees and charges 218w, 672w, 1037–40
NHS 725w

Food Standards Draft Bill Select Committee
1038

Football
402w
Children 376w
Insurance 90w

Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R (16.04.99) 470–533

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Constituencies 33w
Lobbying 34w
Public appointments 383w
Public expenditure 34w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 510–1w
Treaty of Amsterdam 38w, 406w
USA 567w
Visits abroad 404–5w
Written questions 342w, 406w

Foreign investment in UK
Glasgow 199–200w
Japan 367w, 513w
Korea 367w, 513w
Northern Ireland 143w
Wales 730w

Foreign relations
Devolution 728w
Nigeria 509w
Pakistan 507w
Serbia 611–2w
Spain 305–6w

Foreign workers
Legal aid 586w, 604w

Forms
Inland Revenue 426–7w

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 471, 473, 476, 487, 502, 505, 509, 514–6, 518, 530
Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill, 2R adjourned (23.04.99) 1208
Licensing (Young Persons) Bill, 2R adjourned (16.04.99) 539–40
Pinochet, Augusto, Points of order (22.04.99) 1059
Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, Money res (14.04.99) 333, 337–9
Questions
Business questions 378–9, 1048–9
Taxation, Energy 362
UNESCO, Poverty 235w

Foster, Mr Don
Questions
Class sizes 345–9w, 381–2w
Class sizes, Primary education 436–44w
Class sizes, Reception classes 349–55w
Education, Finance 678–82w
Information officers, Northern Ireland Office 276w
New deal for young people 355w
People's panel 166w, 638w
Primary education, Scotland 310w
Schools, Finance 356–7w
Skyline College, Censorship 253w
Teachers, Pay 344w

Foster, Mr Michael, (Hastings and Rye)
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 262, 294–6

Foster, Mr Michael John, (Worcester)
Questions
Export credit guarantees, Angola 94w

Foulkes, Mr George, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development
Questions
Cuba, Human rights 209–10
Cuba, Overseas aid 209
Cuba, Politics and government 210
Developing countries, Bananas 209
Developing countries, Overseas trade 208–9
European Commission, EC aid 213–4
Kosovo, EC aid 213–4
Mediterranean region, EC external relations 127w
Montserrat, Refugees 124w
Overseas aid 212–3
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 231w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept for International Development 125–6w
Swaziland, Females 127w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept for International Development 127–8w

Fox, Dr Liam
Debates etc.
Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill, Points of order (14.04.99) 227

France
Animal welfare 1033
Immigration controls 37w
International cooperation 405w
Treaty of Amsterdam 568w

Franchises
Train operating companies 414w

Fraud
National insurance 586–7w

Freedom of Tax Information Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
1R (20.04.99) 699–702

Freemasonry
Crown Prosecution Service 4w, 699w
Police 712w

Freight
Railways 4, 52w, 77w

Friendly societies
619w

Fuel poverty
Health (23.04.99) 1203–9
Pensioners 78–9w, 477–8w

Fuel Safety Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (16.04.99) 541

Fuels
Ascension Island 256w
Excise duties 245–6w, 299w, 331w, 586w

Fund raising
Charities 24–6w

Further education
Headteachers 173w, 559w

Fyfe, Maria
Questions
Developing countries, Overseas trade 208–9

Gaelic language
Northern Ireland 362–3w
Schools 362–3w

Galbraith, Mr Sam, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Questions
Beta-interferon, Scotland 200–1w
Breast cancer, Scotland 202w
Breast feeding, Scotland 194–5w
Caesarean sections, Scotland 193w
Child minding, Scotland 196–7w
Health, Inverclyde 574–5w
Heart diseases, Scotland 201w
HIV infection, Scotland 575w
Institutional care, Scotland 570w
Maternity services, Scotland 193w
Out-patients, Scotland 191–3w
Pharmacy, Scotland 571–2w
Scottish health boards, Expenditure 190–1w

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 477, 492–8, 505–6
Kosovo (13.04.99) 30, (19.04.99) 574
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 160
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 440–2
Questions
Social Security Contributions Agency, Computers 591w

Galloway, Mr George
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 632–4, 664

Gambling
Young people 524w

Gapes, Mr Mike
Questions
Food Standards Agency 1039
Taxation, Poverty 328w

Garages and petrol stations
Petrol alternatives 17–8, 624w

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 960
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 711, 715, 728, 741–2, 772, 774, 790–1.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 514, 516
Questions
Housing, Leasehold 260w
Taxation, Shipping 366–7

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 237, 241–52, 270–1, 278–9, 281, 303, 322
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 974–5
Questions
Legal aid scheme 532–3w
Legal aid scheme, Civil proceedings 533w
Legal aid scheme, Criminal proceedings 533w
Simpson, John, Kosovo 901–2

Gas fired power stations
Alton 455–6w
Baglan Bay 268w

Gazumping
65w

General Certificate of Secondary Education
Digital broadcasting 254w

General Teaching Council for England (Constitution) Regulations 1999
Debates etc.
(20.04.99) 817

General Teaching Council for Wales (Constitution) Regulations 1999
Debates etc.
(20.04.99) 817

Genetically modified organisms
see also Sainsbury of Turville, Lord: Peers' interests
1w, 392w, 541–2w, 895–6
Brazil 320w
Crops 56w, 216–7w, 229w, 259w, 301–2w, 321w, 368w, 394–6w, 411w, 550w, 594w, 673w, 702–4w, 896
Departmental responsibilities 449w, 594w
Developing countries 210–2
Food 55–6w, 83–4w, 221w, 239w, 297w, 322w, 394w, 673w, 707w, 896
Grazing land 473w
Honey 321w
Maize 515–6w
Monmouthshire 49–50w, 477w
Salmon 525w, 627w
USA 291w

George, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (21.04.99) 871–2
Questions
Domestic violence, Homicide 23w, 534w

George, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 594–7

George, Mr Bruce *—continued*
Questions
Employment schemes, Older workers 556w
Energy, Conservation 80–1w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Questions
Arms trade, Sri Lanka 262w
Fares, Concessions 10
Middle East, Peace negotiations 690–1
Sri Lanka, Non-governmental organisations 126w

Gibb, Mr Nick
Questions
Budget March 1999 495w, 588w
Budget March 1999, Equal opportunities 588w
Budget March 1999, Literacy 587w
Economic and monetary union 499w
Financial services, Regulation 330w
Income tax 387–90w
Income tax, Computers 726w
Income tax, Pensioners 330w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 387w
Individual savings accounts, Advertising 492w, 587w
Inland Revenue, Correspondence 426w
Inland Revenue, Standards 425–6w
Members, Correspondence 387w
Modernising government programme, Publicity 531–2w
National debt 495w
National insurance contributions 358–9
Official engagements, Treasury 496w
Public expenditure 495w
Public sector net cash requirement 496w
Science enterprise challenge 453–4w
Self-assessment of tax, Wye Valley 614–6w
Self-employed contributions 619w
Small Business Service, Operating costs 552w
Small businesses, Pay 427–8w
Taxation, Leaflets 588w
University Challenge Fund 454w
Winter fuel payments 591–2w

Gibraltar
595w
Armed forces 41w
European Parliament elections 569w

Gibson, Dr Ian
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1143, 1153
Social security, Lone parents (23.04.99) 1212–4
Questions
Cancer, Health services 104–5w
Curriculum, Science 165w
Directors, Pay 306–7w
Medical profession, Training 902–3
Mental patients, Death 108–9w
Mental patients, Restraint techniques 109w
Prisoners, Death 23–4w

Gift aid
332–3w

Gifts and endowments
Defence equipment 241–2w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 575
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 988–9, 992, 997
Questions
European Commission, Disciplinary proceedings 509w

Gill, Mr Christopher *—continued*
Fishery agreements, Africa 517w
Fishery agreements, Mauritania 517w
Heart diseases, Waiting lists 527–8w
Inland Revenue, Forms 426–7w
Kosovo, Uranium 471w
Meat, Inspections 1034–5

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Questions
Arms trade, EC action 407w
Arms trade, Export controls 455w
Chile 696–7
Foreign investment in UK, Japan 513w
Foreign investment in UK, Korea 367w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 216

Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Questions
Public sector, Absenteeism 599w
Trident 564–5w

Glasgow
Foreign investment in UK 199–200w
Public expenditure 176w

Gloucestershire
Housing (14.04.99) 189–97

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 703, 705
Kosovo (19.04.99) 576
Questions
Belfast Agreement 905–6
Cuba, Human rights 209–10
Electronic equipment, Industrial health and safety 478–9w
Fisheries, Irish Sea 1030
Fishing vessels, Prosecutions 229w
Health, Inverclyde 574–5w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 679–80
Solvents, Health hazards 479w

Goggins, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1159–63
Colombia (14.04.99) 198–201
Questions
Colombia 508w
Debts written off, Developing countries 364
EC aid 233w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service 397–8w

Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Questions
Montserrat, Refugees 124w

Gordon, Eileen
Debates etc.
World War II, Monuments (21.04.99) 876–9
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 392w
NHS Direct, Back pain 652w
Secondary education, Havering 713–4w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Debates, Points of order (15.04.99) 459
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 431, 435, 446–9

Gorrie, Mr Donald
Questions
EC grants and loans, Scotland 570–1w
EC grants and loans, Scottish Office 197–8w
Education, Equipment 177w

Gorrie, Mr Donald*—*continued
Road traffic, Scotland 198w
Scottish Parliament, Buildings 184w

Government Communications Headquarters
Internet 34w

Government departments
Advertising 601w
Annual reports 531w
Computer viruses 146w
Correspondence 897–8
Education action zones 435–6w
Internet 898
Intranets 602w
Operating costs 590w
Public opinion 599w
Telephone services 601w

Granger Telecom
Chechnya 256–7w, 383–4w

Grant maintained schools
Finance 431–2w

Gray, Mr James
Questions
Constituencies, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 33w

Grazing land
Genetically modified organisms 473w

Great Yarmouth
Flood control 1027

Greater London
Fares 10
New deal schemes 163–4w

Greater London Authority
Buildings 477w

Greece
Cultural relations 35w
Treaty of Amsterdam 568w

Green, Mr Damian
Questions
Apprentices 171w

Greenbelt
66w
Northern Ireland 145w
Scotland 195–6w
Wales 136w, 599w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 477–8, 495, 501–8, 517
Licensing (Young Persons) Bill, 2R adjourned (16.04.99) 537–8
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 395–405
Questions
Flood control, River Derwent 593w, 1027–8

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 233, 236, 240–1, 275–80, 282, 323
Questions
EC budget, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 84w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 673w

Griffiths, Jane
Questions
Armenia 506–7w
Bananas, EC external trade 505w
Regional planning and development, Research 70w
Roads, South East region 369w
USA, Capital punishment 383w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 27
Questions
Pharmacy, Scotland 571–2w
Social security benefits, Disabled 566

Griffiths, Mr Win
Questions
EC enlargement 684

Grogan, Mr John
Questions
Fares, Concessions 5–6

Guarantees
Immigration 670w

Guide dogs
Quarantine 219w

Gulf War
see Iraq-Kuwait conflict

Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust
Public appointments 375–6w

Habitual residence test
559–60

Hague, Rt Hon William
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 21–2
Questions
Better Regulation Task Force, Small businesses 903–4
Kosovo, Armed conflict 899–900

Hain, Mr Peter, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Questions
A449, Noise 728w
Assisted areas, Wales 285w
Aviation, Wales 284w
EC grants and loans, Wales 501w
Fares, Wales 502–3w
Iron and steel, Wales 285w
Job creation, Wales 502w
National Assembly for Wales, Members 730w
Small businesses, Wales 500w
Teachers, Wales 285w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Welsh Office 286w

Hall, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 66, 76–7

Hamilton
Children 204w

Hamilton, Neil
Al-Fayed, Mohammed 1044

Hammersmith and Fulham
Police 21w
Racial violence 3w, 21–2w
Stop and search 21w

Hammond, Mr Philip
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 42, 73, 81, 98, 112–6
Members' interests, Points of order (21.04.99) 909
Prescription drugs (13.04.99) 134
Questions
Benefits Agency Medical Service, Contracts 277w
Brumby Hospital Scunthorpe 268w
Mahon, Alice, Serbia 905
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 207

Hampshire
Intensive care 270w

Hancock, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1169–72
Questions
Armed conflict, Overseas residence 559–60w
Armed forces, Ceremonies 323w
Armed forces, Sick leave 371w
Armed forces, Statutory sick pay 371–2w
Building and Property Group, Contracts 48–9w
Building and Property Group, Vetting 240w, 722w
Civil service agencies, Annual reports 38–40w
Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency, Standards 40w
Defence Estate Organisation 632w
EH101 helicopters 47w
Incapacity benefit, Exservicemen 401–2w
Liver diseases, Medical treatments 723–4w
Military exercises, Central Europe 371w
Military exercises, Turkey 240w
Millennium landmark projects 481w, 637w
Minesweepers 46w
Navy, Animal experiments 243–4w, 719–21w
Navy, Drugs 370w
Nuclear weapons, Accidents 372w
Quarantine 215w
Rescue services, Ministry of Defence 372w
Teachers 165w
Type 23 frigates 44w

Harman, Rt Hon Harriet
Questions
Conditions of employment 326–7w
Lone parents, Income support 151w

Harris, Dr Evan
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 52, 95, 120
Prescription drugs (13.04.99) 130–1
Questions
Visas, Fees and charges 694–5

Harvey, Mr Nick
Questions
Regional development agencies 475–6w

Haskins Task Force
see Better Regulation Task Force

Havering
Secondary education 713–4w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 233, 256–60, 264
Excise duties (21.04.99) 921–2
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 142, 145, 149
Questions
Railways, Investment 15

Hayes, Mr John
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 944, 956–7
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 975, 1006
Questions
Codex Alimentarius Commission 294w
Council tax 70–1w
Cystic fibrosis, Prescriptions 380w
Dietary supplements 293–4w
Drugs, Licensing 95–6w, 109w
EC Scientific Committee for Food 295w
Food Advisory Committee 220w
Herbal medicine, Licensing 109–10w

Hayes, Mr John—*continued*
Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Expert Group 293w, 295w
Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Expert Group, Business interests 293w
Vitamin B6 294w, 445w

Hay-Plumb Task Force
see Coalfields Task Force

Headteachers
Further education 173w, 559w
Pay 344w

Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Questions
Skilled workers, Shortages 900

Heald, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 296–9
Questions
A505 71w
Roads, Baldock 369w

Healey, Mr John
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 239
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1166, 1174–81
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1075, 1118–20
Questions
Construction, Standards 1–2
New deal for young people, Complaints 557w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 35w
Sierra Leone, Select committee reports 35–6w

Health
Children 642–5w
Fuel poverty (23.04.99) 1203–9
Inverclyde 574–5w

Health authorities
Cornwall 526–7w
Debts written off 129–33w
Devon 526–7w
Investment 424w
Wales 129–33w

Health Bill (HL) 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R, Money res* and Ways and means res* (13.04.99) 38–128

Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R adjourned (23.04.99) 1203–9

Health education
Drugs 559w, 894
Sex 530w

Health hazards
Air pollution 540–1w
Animal products 393w
Riot control weapons 107w
Solvents 479w

Health insurance
Age 331w

Health services
Armed forces 44–6w, 114w, 566w, 631w, 718–9w
Cancer 104–7w
Millennium 274–5w
Pensioners 530–1w
Standards 539w

Hearing impaired
Disability living allowance 462–4w

Hearing impaired—*continued*
War pensions 307–8w

Heart diseases
Scotland 201w
Staffordshire 527–8w
Waiting lists 100–1w, 527–8w

Heath, Mr David
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 626–8
Leach, Carole, Homicide (14.04.99) 346–9
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service 608–9w
Developing countries, Genetically modified organisms 211
East Timor 686
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 601w
State retirement pensions 460w

Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 915–23, 965
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 711–7, 720–1
Questions
Cambodia, Overseas aid 576w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 368–9w
Excise duties, Lorries 360–1

Heathrow Airport
Public inquiries 69w

Heavily indebted poor countries initiative
216

Hedges and ditches
Conservation 63w

Henderson, Mr Doug, Minister for the Armed Forces
Questions
Air force, Deployment 723–4w
Armed conflict, Overseas residence 559–60w
Armed forces, Ceremonies 323w
Armed forces, Clothing 40–1w
Armed forces, Convictions 40w
Armed forces, Deployment 632–3w, 722w
Armed forces, Gibraltar 41w
Armed forces, Health services 44–6w, 566w, 631w, 718–9w
Armed forces, Malaysia 562w
Armed forces, Personal records 370–1w
Armed forces, Pregnancy 41w
Armed forces, Sick leave 371w
Armed forces, Statutory sick pay 371–2w
Armed forces, Training 632w
Armed forces, Young people 560–1w
Army, Deployment 724w
Ascension Island, Fuels 256w
Centre for Defence Medicine 44w
Civil defence, Nuclear weapons 42w
Civil service agencies, Annual reports 38–40w
Clegg, Lee, Legal costs 42–3w
Davies, Nicholas, Injunctions 373–4w
Defence Clothing and Textiles Agency, Standards 40w
Electronic warfare, Wellington Barracks 561w
European Court of Human Rights, Ministry of Defence 41w
Exercise Dimming Sun 722w
Exservicemen, Injuries 324w
Falkland Islands, Aviation 42w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 721–2w
Firearms, Training 631w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Uranium 43–4w, 372–3w
KPMG, Ministry of Defence 400w
Military aircraft 44w
Military exercises, Central Europe 371w

Henderson, Mr Doug—*continued*
Military intelligence 47w
Ministry of Defence Police, Conditions of employment 41–2w
Navy, Animal experiments 243–4w, 719–21w
Navy, Deployment 723w
Navy, Drugs 370w
Nuclear weapons, Accidents 372w
Rescue services, Ministry of Defence 372w
Royal Armoured Corps 373w
Royal Auxiliary Air Force, Deployment 723w
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 47w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Ministry of Defence 325w
Territorial Army 42w, 400–1w
War pensions 562w, 632w

Hepatitis
108w
Prisoners 316–7w

Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Questions
Regional government, North East region 14

Heppell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1104–8
Questions
Lone parents, Employment 461w

Herbal medicine
Licensing 105w, 109–10w, 527w

Herefordshire
Common agricultural policy 217w
Student numbers 171w, 558w

Heroin
Drug seizures 580–1w

Hesford, Mr Stephen
Questions
Rape, Administration of justice 662w

Hewitt, Ms Patricia, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Mortgages, Codes of practice (15.04.99) 464–8
Questions
Alternative energy 330–1w
Bank notes 493–4w
Budget March 1999 495w
Cancer 248w
Cancer, Death rate 248–50w
Car allowances 427w
Cars, Engines 301w
Census, Disclosure of information 588–90w
Child care tax credit 245w
Childbirth 334w
Children, Poverty 244–5w
Credit unions 120w
Credit unions, Shares 619–20w
Crime prevention, Treasury 244w
Cycling 360
Death rate, Wales 498w
Debts written off, Developing countries 325w
EC budget, Contributions 251–2w, 333–4w
EC Finance Council 119w, 618w
Economic and monetary union 247w, 327w, 499w, 727w
Economic and monetary union, Exchange rates 118w, 368
Economic and monetary union, Referendums 327w

Hewitt, Ms Patricia*—*continued
Economic and monetary union, Small businesses 327–8w, 367
Endowment mortgages 252w
Environmental impact assessment, Treasury 490w, 586w
Ethnic groups 386w
Euro, Bank notes 494w
Euro, Business 493w
Euro, Coinage 247w
Euro, Task forces 495w
European Central Bank, Pay 496–7w
European Scrutiny Committee, Treasury 494–5w
Exchange rates 368
Exchange rates, Mark 251w
Excise duties, Diesel fuel 115–6w, 119w, 325w
Excise duties, Fuels 245–6w, 331w, 586w
Excise duties, Lorries 335–6w, 359–61
Excise duties, Motor vehicles 492–3w
Excise duties, Petrol 115w, 118w
Financial services, Regulation 330w
Financial Services and Markets Bill (Draft) 252w
Financial Services Authority 490w
Friendly societies 619w
Gift aid 332–3w
Health insurance, Age 331w
Income tax, Computers 726w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 387w
Individual savings accounts 362–4
Individual savings accounts, Advertising 492w, 587w
KPMG, Treasury 492w
Lobbying, Treasury 120w
Long term unemployed, Wales 499w
Lorries, Correspondence 427w
Millennium compliance, Insurance companies 707w
National debt 495w
Overseas aid, Indonesia 387w
Pay, Employment 332w
Pensions 329w
Performance appraisal, Treasury 116–7w
Personal savings 615–6w
Public appointments, Treasury 493w
Public records, Access 120w
Public sector net cash requirement 496w
Self-employed contributions 491w
Social security benefits, Widowed people 331w
Statistics 331w
Statistics, Treasury 726–7w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Treasury 497w
Stocks and shares, Stamp duties 617w
Tax credit, Pensioners 118w
Taxation, Alternative energy 332w
Taxation, Environment protection 726w
Taxation, Euro 588w
Taxation, Motor vehicles 359
Taxation, Pesticides 328w
Taxation, Pollution control 725w
Teenage pregnancy 246–7w
Teenage pregnancy, Wales 497–8w
Tobacco, Excise duties 492w
Tobacco, Prices 491w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Treasury 727w
Unemployment 247–8w, 335w
VAT 491w
Winter fuel payments 117–8w
Written questions, Treasury 335w

HFC Bank Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
Rep* (19.04.99) 551

Higher civil servants
Ethnic groups 600w

Hillsborough Stadium Evidence Inquiry
Disclosure of information 486w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 63–5
Questions
Child Migrant Support Fund 529–30w

HIV infection
538–9w
Scotland 575w
Screening 645–7w

Hodge, Ms Margaret*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1075, 1084, 1125–30
Questions
Children, Day care 160–1w
New deal for disabled people 523w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept for Education and Employment 430–1w
Work permits 431w

Hoey, Miss Kate*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 505, 508–13
Questions
Administration of justice, EC action 510w
EU Justice and Home Affairs Council 12–3w, 19w, 258–9w
EU Justice and Home Affairs Council, Administrative delays 583w
European Police Office 317w
Interpol, Arrest warrants 5w
Kamara, John, Criminal Cases Review Commission 22w
Police, Ethnic groups 21w
Racial violence, Hammersmith and Fulham 21–2w
Schengen Agreement 24w, 258w
Stop and search, Hammersmith and Fulham 21w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Home Office 417w
Virdi, Gurpal, Disciplinary proceedings 488–9w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 28, (19.04.99) 584, 590, 619–20
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 977
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 390–1, 410, 418, 430, 432–7, 444, 448, 454
Questions
Business questions 377
Lockerbie, Bombings 689

Home detention curfews
660w

Home Office
Advisory bodies 310–2w
Business plans 420w
Consultation papers 417w
Environmental impact assessment 415w
Ethnic groups 4–5w
Lobbying 14w
Public appointments 655–6w
Statistics 582–3w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 416w
Treaty of Amsterdam 417w
USA 417w
Written questions 316w

Home shopping
54w

Homicide
Criminal proceedings 610–1w
Domestic violence 23w, 534w
Finucane, Patrick 470w
Leach, Carole (14.04.99) 346–52

Honey
394–6w
Genetically modified organisms 321w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 610–1, 621–2, 660
Questions
EC Consumer Affairs Council 452–3w
EC Finance Council 618w
EC Fisheries Council 221w
Local government services, Scotland 525w

Hoon, Mr Geoffrey*, *Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Dept
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 230–41, 264, 319
Children, Kidnapping (22.04.99) 1135–8
Questions
Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99, Equal opportunities 674–5w
Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99, Lord Chancellor's Dept 604w
Barristers 534w, 675w
Barristers, Limited liability 429w
Census, Correspondence 676–7w
Census, Disclosure of information 677w
Conditional fee agreements 534w
Duty solicitors 676w
Employment tribunals 32–3w
Environmental impact assessment, Lord Chancellor's Dept 30w
Judges, Business interests 30–2w
Judiciary, Complaints 603–4w
Judiciary, Public appointments 33w
Legal Aid Board, Sick leave 603w
Legal aid scheme 532–3w
Legal aid scheme, Civil proceedings 533w
Legal aid scheme, Criminal proceedings 533w
Legal profession 428w
Legal profession, Complaints 428w
Lobbying, Lord Chancellor's Dept 29–30w
Magistrates' courts 29w
Magistrates' courts, Stow-on-the-Wold 429w
Parental responsibility 602–3w
Public appointments, Lord Chancellor's Dept 340w
Public records 33w
Rights of audience 676w
Social Security Commissioners 32w
Solicitors, Limited liability 533w
Statistics, Lord Chancellor's Dept 604w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Treasury 428w
Written questions, Lord Chancellor's Dept 340w

Hope, Mr Phil
Questions
Business questions 379

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin
Questions
Parental responsibility 602–3w

Horam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 82–5

Horizon project
399w

Horticulture
Bees 674w

Hospitals
Bedfordshire 337w
Catering 530w
Discharges 268w
Private finance initiative 531w
Waiting lists 103–4w

House of Commons
Alternative energy 28–9w

House of Commons Modernisation Select Committee
see Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee

Housing
Construction 78w
Essex 260w
Gloucestershire (14.04.99) 189–97
Leasehold 260w
Local authorities 547w
Ministry of Defence 323w

Housing benefit
150w, 562
Abuse 457–8w
Mature students 465w

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 582–8
Questions
European Commission 687–8
Kosovo, Armed conflict 681–2

***Howarth, Mr Alan**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Listed buildings, Religion 87–8w
World heritage sites, Atlantic Ocean 706w

***Howarth, Mr George**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Licensing (Young Persons) Bill, 2R adjourned (16.04.99) 538–40
Questions
Animal experiments 19–21w
Animal Procedures Committee, Public appointments 581–2w
Coroners 22w
Council housing, Smoke alarms 62w
Drug seizures, Amphetamines 581w
Drug seizures, Cocaine 580–1w
Drug seizures, Methyl amphetamines 579–80w
Feltham Young Offender Institution and Remand Centre 17–9w
Fire engines 661w
Home detention curfews 660w
Identity cards 14w
Local government, Elections 583–4w
Polling stations, Access 418–9w
Prisoners, Alternative medicine 257–8w
Prisoners, Death 23–4w
Prisoners, Hepatitis 316–7w
Prisoners, Infectious diseases 23w
Prisoners on remand 419–20w
Prisons, Disposable syringes 23w
Prisons, Essex 317w
Prisons, Portland 418w
Prisons, Recruitment 710–1w
Probation officers, Age 660w
Probation officers, Retirement 658–60w
Smoke alarms 15–6w
Summertime 24w
Voting methods, Sight impaired 418w
Women's prisons, Ashford 316w
Young offenders, Wales 657–8w

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Pinochet, Augusto, Points of order (22.04.99) 1058–9

***Howells, Dr Kim**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Arms trade, Export controls 260–2w, 455w
Arms trade, Indonesia 263w
Arms trade, Sri Lanka 262w
Banks, Fees and charges 605w
Chemical Weapons Act 1996 267w
Cooperatives, Dairy farming 94w
Drugs, Licensing 95–6w
EC Consumer Affairs Council 452–3w
Milk Marque 95w
Motor vehicles, EC action 450w
Riot control weapons, Export controls 456w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept of Trade and Industry 551w
Supermarkets 262–3w
Untreated milk 451w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Questions
Armed forces, Clothing 40–1w
British Standards Institution 71–2w
Housing, Ministry of Defence 323w
Military aircraft 44w
Motability 637–9w
Motor vehicles, Unleaded petrol 300w
World Tourism Organisation, Membership 578w

Hughes, Ms Beverley
Debates etc.
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 418, 434–5, 437–40

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 47, 65–71
Sites of special scientific interest (14.04.99) 164–5
Questions
Accident and emergency departments 104w
Crown Prosecution Service, Disclosure of information 4w
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust, Public appointments 375–6w
Homicide, Criminal proceedings 610–1w
Hospitals, Private finance initiative 531w
MMR vaccine 110–2w
NHS, Income 641w
Pensions 562–3
People's panel, Environmental health 890
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 231w

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority
450w

Human Genetics Advisory Commission
450w
Conflict of interests 449w

Human rights
Annual reports 256w
China 36w
Cuba 209–10
Sierra Leone 568w

Humble, Mrs Joan
Questions
Fisheries 674w
Fisheries, Fleetwood 1029

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Public footpaths, Motor vehicles (21.04.99) 882–5, 888
Questions
Income tax, Tax credit 330w
Public transport 55w

Hunting
Petitions (16.04.99) 469

***Hutton, Mr John**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1191–202
Drugs, Children (19.04.99) 673–8
Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill, 2R adjourned (23.04.99) 1207–9
Questions
Accident and emergency departments 104w
Ambulance services, Bedfordshire 337w
Breast cancer, Screening 654w
Cancer 652–4w
Cancer, Alternative medicine 106w
Cancer, Health services 104–7w
Cancer, Information services 647–8w
Child Migrant Support Fund 529–30w
Children, Football 376w
Children in care 104w, 113–4w
Children in care, Ethnic groups 725w
Compulsorily detained mental patients 107w
Depressive illnesses 650w
Health authorities, Investment 424w
Hepatitis 108w
Hospitals, Bedfordshire 337w
Institutional care, Bedfordshire 376w
Kidney patients 650–2w
Liver diseases, Medical treatments 723–4w
Maternity Services Multidisciplinary Working Party 423w
Mental health services 543–4w
Mental health services, Ethnic groups 543w
Mental health services, Finance 543w
Mental patients, Death 108–9w
Mental patients, Restraint techniques 109w, 374w
Mentally ill, Community care 107w
Multiple sclerosis 376–7w, 423w
Myelography, Side effects 101w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence, Disabled 380w
Neurology 270w
NHS, Food Standards Agency 725w
Pensioners, Health services 530–1w
Residential homes, Bedfordshire 337w
Urinary system, Diseases 422w
Wigs 112–3w

Hygiene
Doctors 113w
Meat 1034

Hypothermia
Northern Ireland 141–3w

Iddon, Dr Brian
Questions
Dietary supplements, Retail trade 321w
Food, Exports 1032–3
Food Advisory Committee, EC Scientific Committee for Food 221w
Herbal medicine, Licensing 105w, 527w
Iraq, Sanctions 509w
Methadone 893
Social security benefits, Mentally ill 556
Tree planting, Scotland 614w

***Iddon, Dr Brian**—continued*
Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Expert Group 216w
Vitamin B6 320w

Identity cards
14w

Illegal immigrants
[illegible]-7w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 756–9
Questions
Lead, EC action 54w
Medicines Control Agency, Standards 544w

Immigrants
Crime 667w
Detainees 666–7w

Immigration
Advisory services 484–5w
Appeals 667w
Applications 666w, 670w
Guarantees 670w
Latvia 14w

Immigration and Nationality Directorate
485w, 663w
Administration 662w
Administrative delays 6w, 490w, 664–5w
Buildings 664–5w
Croydon 710w
Manpower 664w
Productivity 663w
Resignations 485–6w
Siemens Business Services 664w
Standards 485w, 663w
Telephone services 5–6w, 663w

Immigration controls
France 37w
Manpower 10w

Immigration Services Commissioner
Fees and charges 656–7w
Operating costs 657w

Immigration Services Tribunal
Operating costs 655–6w

Immunity certificates
727w

Imperial College Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
3R* (20.04.99) 679

Import controls
Food 1031

Imports
Asbestos 96w
Milk 321–2w
Pigmeat 217w, 518w

Incapacity benefit
555–6
Availability for work 457w
Exservicemen 401–2w
West Midlands 522w

Income support
278w
Lone parents 151w
Pensioners 277–8w, 521w

Income tax
387–90w
Computers 726w
Pensioners 118–9w, 330w
Personal savings 355–6
Tax credit 330w
Tax rates and bands 121w, 387w

Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres
Annual reports 699w

India
234–5w
Visas 37w

Individual savings accounts
362–4
Advertising 492w, 587w

Indonesia
Armed forces 37w
Arms trade 263w
Overseas aid 387w

Industrial diseases
Compensation 899

Industrial health and safety
Electronic equipment 478–9w
European Scrutiny Committee 69w
Noise 282w

Infectious diseases
Prisoners 23w

Information officers
Northern Ireland Office 276w

Information services
Cancer 647–8w

Information society initiative
453w

Information technology
Advisory services 895
Taxation 366

***Ingram, Rt Hon Adam**, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
Administration of justice, Personal records 359w
Alternative energy, Northern Ireland 360w
Arrest warrants, Northern Ireland 363–4w
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 144w, 536–7w
Equal opportunities, Northern Ireland 364–5w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 359–60w, 606–8w
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 143w
Maghaberry Prison, Sick leave 469–70w
Maghaberry Prison, Violence 364w
Police, Northern Ireland 535–6w
Proscribed organisations, Arrests 139–40w
Riot control weapons, Northern Ireland 537w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Northern Ireland Office 361–2w, 467–9w
Victims' Liaison Unit, Northern Ireland 472–3w

Injunctions
Davies, Nicholas 373–4w

Injuries
Exservicemen 324w

Inland Revenue
Correspondence 426w
Forms 426–7w
Standards 425–6w

Inland waterways
EC law 57w
Scotland 221

Insects
Pesticides 516w

Institutional care
Bedfordshire 376w
Scotland 570w

Insurance
Driving offences 340w, 416w
Football 90w

Insurance companies
Millennium compliance 707w

Integrated administration and control system
290–1w, 318w, 390w

Intensive care
Hampshire 270w

Inter-American Development Bank
Poverty 233–4w

Interest rates
354–5

Internal drainage boards
396w

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
see World Bank

International cooperation
France 405w

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
665–6w

International Criminal Court
510w

International Labour Organisation
World Trade Organisation 231w

International Monetary Fund
Education 232w

Internet
Government Communications Headquarters 34w
Government departments 898
Ministry of Defence 45–6w
Trade 555w

Interpol
Arrest warrants 5w

Intranets
Government departments 602w

Inverclyde
Health 574–5w

Investment income
Pensioners 156w

Iraq
36w, 255–6w
Export credit guarantees 92–3w
Peace keeping operations 323w, 508w
Sanctions 509w

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
Uranium 43–4w, 372–3w

Irish Sea
Fisheries 1029–30

Iron and steel
Wales 285w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 704, 722, 724, 734–44, 804
Questions
Common agricultural policy 391w
Common agricultural policy, Duchy of Lancaster 600w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 593w
Common agricultural policy, Sugar 217w
Fisheries, Irish Sea 1029
Serious Fraud Office 609w
Withholding tax 898–9

***Jackson, Ms Glenda**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Public footpaths, Motor vehicles (21.04.99) 885–8
Questions
A30 704w
A47 52w
A505 71w
B5404 73–4w
British Rail 67w
British Standards Institution 71–2w
Bus Employees' Superannuation Trust 58w
Bus lanes 60w
Bus services, Bedfordshire 76w
Bus services, Passengers 629–30w
Bypasses 544–5w
Driving tests, Crosby 474w
Exhaust emissions 409w, 412w
Fares, Concessions 10, 70w
Fares, Greater London 10
Fuels, Excise duties 299w
Home shopping 54w
Inland waterways, EC law 57w
London Regional Transport, Assets 475w
London Regional Transport, Project Prestige 60w
London Underground, Investment 12–3, 620–1w
London Underground, Joint ventures 474w
London Underground, Standards 620w
Manchester Airport, Manchester Metrolink 16
Manchester Airport, Roads 16–7
Materials handling equipment, Licensing 624w
Millennium compliance, Aviation 75–6w
Motor vehicles, Databases 69w
Motor vehicles, Excise duties 545w
Motor vehicles, Licensing 408w
Motor vehicles, Unleaded petrol 300w
Motorcycles 259–60w, 550–1w
National cycling strategy 414w
Orange badge scheme 68–9w
Petrol alternatives, Garages and petrol stations 17–8, 624w
Ports, Newhaven 66w
Priority routes, Wandsworth 64w
Public transport, Disabled 52w
Public transport, Grants 66w
Railtrack, Investment 413–4w
Railway network, Cheltenham 76w
Railway stations, Manpower 628w
Railway track, Electrification 73w
Railways, Passengers 629w
Railways, Standards 54w
Regional airports 630w
Regional planning and development, Research 70w
Road traffic 299w
Road traffic control, Correspondence 77w
Road works, Standard spending assessments 260w
Roads, Accidents 76w
Roads, Baldock 369w
Roads, Construction 704w
Roads, Noise 72–3w
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 54w
Roads, South East region 369w
Shipping, Drunkenness 63–4w
Speed limits, Publicity 473–4w
Speed limits, Road signs 259w
Strategic Rail Authority 67w
Trans-European networks 53–4w
Urban railways, Grants 67w
Warrington Central Station, Manpower 628–9w
West coast railway line, Standards 75w

Jackson, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 983

Japan
Foreign investment in UK 367w, 513w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing 451–2w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 924, 932, 936, 940, 943–5, 950, 959–62
Questions
Excise duties, Lorries 427w
KPMG, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 625w
KPMG, Ministry of Defence 400w
KPMG, Treasury 492w
Lorries, Correspondence 427w
Lorries, Operating costs 550w
Members, Correspondence 404w
National cycling strategy 414w
National Rail Summit 414w
Railtrack, Investment 5, 413–4w
Railways 414w
Railways, Expenditure 479w
Train operating companies, Franchises 414w

Jenkins, Mr Brian
Questions
B5404 73–4w
Common agricultural policy, Staffordshire 217w

Job creation
Wales 502w

Jobcentres
Minimum wage 169–70w

Johnson, Mr Alan
Questions
Libyan Arab Republic, Sanctions 512–3w
Materials handling equipment, Licensing 624w
MV Gaul, Accidents 369–70w

Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 622–4

Joint Consultative Committee with the Liberal Democratic Party
see Labour Liberal Democrats Joint Consultative Committee

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 704
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 983
Questions
Alternative medicine, Wales 502w
Assisted areas, Wales 285w
Aviation, Wales 284w
Common agricultural policy, Wales 696w
Dental services, Wales 430w
Economic situation 353
Greenbelt, Wales 599w
Iron and steel, Wales 285w
Job creation, Wales 502w
Long-Term Care Royal Commission 598w
Nurseries, Wales 597w
Nurses, Wales 598w
Out of town shopping centres, Wales 597–8w
Primary care groups, Wales 429–30w
Small businesses, Wales 500w

Jones, Fiona
Rulings and statements (19.04.99) 571–2

Jones, Helen M
Questions
Children, Day care 459–60w

***Jones, Helen M**—continued*
Employment, Closed circuit television 92w
Lockerbie, Bombings 688–9
Railway stations, Manpower 628w
Railways, Passengers 629w
Warrington Central Station, Manpower 628–9w

Jones, Ms Jenny
Questions
France, Immigration controls 37w
Incapacity benefit, West Midlands 522w
India, Visas 37w
Severe disablement allowance 592w
Uranium, Storage 454–5w
Visas 37w

***Jones, Mr Jon Owen**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office*
Questions
Alternative energy, Wales 287–8w
Alternative medicine, Wales 502w
Beef, Wales 599w
Common agricultural policy, Wales 696w
Dental services, Wales 137w, 430w
Depressive illnesses, Wales 288w
Environmental impact assessment, Welsh Office 135–6w
Greenbelt, Wales 136w, 599w
Health authorities, Debts written off 129–33w
Long-Term Care Royal Commission 598w
Mental health services, Wales 136–7w, 286–8w, 695–7w
NHS trusts, Negligence 128–9w
Non-domestic rates, Wales 138w, 289w
Nurseries, Wales 597w
Nurses, Wales 598w
Out of town shopping centres, Wales 597–8w
Planning permission, Wales 288–9w
Primary care groups, Wales 137–8w, 429–30w
Radioactive wastes, Wales 290w
Rain, Wales 336w
River Wye, Navigation 286w
Supermarkets, Wales 289w
Water supply, Wales 289–90w
Wind power, Wales 287w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Questions
Developing countries, Genetically modified organisms 210–1
"Fairer Faster Firmer White Paper" 16w
Government departments, Public opinion 599w
New deal schemes, Training 715–7w
Public sector debt 326w
Social security, Reform 461w
Transsexualism 257w

Jones, Mr Martyn David
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 979

Jones, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 484–8
Questions
Birds, Licensing 74w
Government Communications Headquarters, Internet 34w
Millennium compliance, Insurance companies 707w
Slovakia, Visas 37–8w
Summertime 24w

Jordan
Export credit guarantees 553w

***Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa**, Minister for Public Health, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Cervical cancer (16.04.99) 546–50
Questions
Advisory bodies, Dept of Health 271w, 641–2w
Alternative medicine, Side effects 542w
Breast feeding 107–8w
Children, Health 642–5w
Contraceptives 424w, 648w
Developing countries, Tobacco 337w
Doctors, Hygiene 113w
Drugs, Licensing 109w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept of Health 374–5w
Food poisoning 652w
Genetically modified organisms 541–2w
Health education, Sex 530w
Health hazards, Air pollution 540–1w
Health hazards, Riot control weapons 107w
Herbal medicine, Licensing 105w, 109–10w, 527w
HIV infection 538–9w
HIV infection, Screening 645–7w
Listening to women initiative 378–80w
Lobbying, Dept of Health 108w
Medicines Control Agency, Standards 544w
MMR vaccine 110–2w, 654–5w
Multiple sclerosis, Research 648–50w
NHS, Pensions 654w
Pertussis vaccine 539–40w
Royal College of Midwives, Conferences 542w
Social Exclusion Unit, Teenage pregnancy 424w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept of Health 647w
Sure start programme, Derbyshire 164w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept of Health 269w
Written questions, Dept of Health 337w

Jubilee 2000
215

Judges
Business interests 30–2w

Judicial Committee of the Privy Council
see Privy Council Office Judicial Committee

Judiciary
Complaints 603–4w
Public appointments 33w

Kamara, John
Criminal Cases Review Commission 22w

Kashmir
683–4

Keeble, Ms Sally
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 715, 777–81
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 1005–7
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 400, 402, 404
Questions
Children, Poverty 459w
Common agricultural policy, Consumers 670–1w
Firearms, Compensation 16w
Firearms, Licensing 16w

Keen, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 496

Keetch, Mr Paul
Questions
Albania, Overseas aid 576w
Common agricultural policy, Herefordshire 217w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Employment 714–5w
Consultation papers, Home Office 417w
Kosovo, Refugees 401w, 576w, 640w
Nurses, Training 422w
Open University, Student numbers 557w
Refugees, Kosovo 640w
River Wye, Navigation 286w
Student numbers, Herefordshire 171w, 558w

Kelly, Ms Ruth
Questions
EC institutions, Reform 509w

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 980, 986, 992, 994–9
Questions
Animal welfare 1031–2

Key, Mr Robert
Questions
Armed forces, Pregnancy 41w
European Court of Human Rights, Ministry of Defence 41w
Military intelligence 47w

Khabra, Mr Piara S
Questions
Identity cards 14w
Railway track, Electrification 73w
Railways, Freight 4

Kidnapping
Children (22.04.99) 1132–8

Kidney, Mr David
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 307–10
Mobile homes (21.04.99) 850
Questions
Agriculture, Biodiversity 391w
Agriculture, Land 296w
Crown Prosecution Service 1041
Edexcel Foundation 171–2w
Football 402w
Football, Children 376w
Football, Insurance 90w
Ministry of Defence Police, Conditions of employment 41–2w
National Family and Parenting Institute 482w
Schools, Finance 172w
Statistics 331w
Wigs 112–3w

Kidney patients
650–2w

***Kilfoyle, Mr Peter**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Cabinet Office*
Questions
Advisory services, Information technology 895
Advisory services, Redditch 894–5
Buildings, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 600w
Centre for Management and Policy Studies 147w
Chartermark scheme 602w
Computer viruses, Government departments 146w
Departmental coordination, Elderly 891–2

***Kilfoyle, Mr Peter**—continued*
European Communities, Disclosure of information 148w
European Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet Office 148w
Government departments, Advertising 601w
Government departments, Annual reports 531w
Government departments, Correspondence 897–8
Government departments, Internet 898
Government departments, Intranets 602w
Government departments, Telephone services 601w
Higher civil servants, Ethnic groups 600w
KPMG, Cabinet Office 146w
Local government services 147w
Modernising government programme, Publicity 531–2w
NHS, Pensions 892
People's panel 638w
People's panel, Environmental health 889–90
Public sector, Absenteeism 599w
Statistics, Cabinet Office 601–2w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Cabinet Office 146–7w

King, Mr Andy
Questions
Medical records 652w
Territorial Army 400–1w

King, Ms Oona
Questions
Habitual residence test 559–60
Kosovo, Armed conflict 631w, 679–80

King, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 917, 919
Kosovo (13.04.99) 25–6

Kingham, Ms Tess
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 655–7
Questions
Debts written off, Developing countries 365
Kosovo, Refugees 907–8
Public transport, Disabled 52w

Kingshurst Parish Council
77w

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Questions
Agriculture, Buildings 49w

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Questions
Pensions 552

Korea
447w
Foreign investment in UK 367w, 513w

Kosovo
216–7, 225, (19.04.99) 573–668
Armed conflict 45–6w, 217–9, 242w, 323–4w, 506w, 631w, 679–82, 899–902, 906–7
Disaster relief 471w
EC aid 213–4
Ministerial statements (13.04.99) 19–33
Overseas aid 232w, 576w
Political refugees 489w
Refugees 128w, 301w, 421–2w, 488w, 567w, 576w, 640w, 669w, 701w, 711–2w, 907–8
Simpson, John 901–2
Territorial Army 561w, 633w
Uranium 43w, 471w, 564w

Kosovo—continued
War crimes 219, 567–8w, 613w
Warships 401w

Kosovo Liberation Army
595w
Surveillance 417–8w

KPMG
Cabinet Office 146w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 625w
Ministry of Defence 400w
Treasury 492w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Questions
Cleveland Police Authority, Inquiries 10–1w, 484w, 666w
Crime, Middlesbrough 486w
Education, Middlesbrough 164w
Education action zones 435w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 297w, 322w
Manufacturing industries, Production 555w
Police authorities, Public appointments 712w
Schools, Middlesbrough 166w

Kvaerner Govan
Shipbuilding 218

Labour Liberal Democrats Joint Consultative Committee
340–1w

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Debates etc.
Prescription drugs (13.04.99) 129–33

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 930
Questions
Class sizes, Scotland 282w
Prisoners' release, Northern Ireland 224
Repossession orders, Scotland 184–5w

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 797–8
Questions
Children, Day care 160–1w
Pensions 551–2

Lake Windermere
Speed limits 415w

Lamotrigine
268–9w, 423–4w

Lancashire
Police (21.04.99) 1021–6

Lancaster
891
Business 219–20

Land
Agriculture 296w
Zimbabwe 207–8

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 39
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 394
Questions
Farmers, Personal income 671w
Sainsbury of Turville, Lord, Peers' interests 448w

Latvia
Immigration 14w

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Lawman, Stephen
(21.04.99) 1021–6

Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 674w
CADW Welsh Historic Monuments, Standards 698w
Capital investment, Treasury 120w
Council tax capping, Wales 697–8w
Financial Services and Markets Bill (Draft) 252w
Government departments, Operating costs 590w
National Assembly for Wales, Members 730w
National Assembly for Wales, Standing orders 290w
PAYE 617w

Lawrence, Stephen
see Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry

Le Monde Diplomatique
MacShane, Denis 611w

Leach, Carole
Homicide (14.04.99) 346–52

Lead
EC action 54w

Leasehold
Housing 260w

Legal aid
Foreign workers 586w, 604w

Legal Aid Board
Sick leave 603w

Legal aid scheme
532–3w
Civil proceedings 533w
Criminal proceedings 533w

Legal costs
Clegg, Lee 42–3w

Legal profession
428w
Complaints 428w
Public appointments 1042

Leicestershire
Flood control 1028

Leigh, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 522–4, 530
Kosovo (19.04.99) 585
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 978
Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, Money res (14.04.99) 335, 342
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 428, 433, 438
Questions
Buildings, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 600w

Lepper, Mr David
Questions
Sites of special scientific interest 11

Leslie, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 923, 938–43
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 742
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 48

Letwin, Mr Oliver
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 976
Questions
Council-tax benefits, Elderly 415w
Organic aid scheme 518w
Pigmeat, Imports 518w

Letwin, Mr Oliver—continued
Poultry 519w
Riot control weapons, Export controls 456w

Levitt, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1068, 1074–5, 1107, 1114–8
Questions
Mercenaries 38w
NHS, Classification schemes 270–1w

Lewis, Mr Ivan
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 50, 80–2

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 663
Oral question time intervention (20.04.99) 693
Questions
Business questions 382
Cuba, Politics and government 210
EC enlargement 684
Economic and monetary union, Referendums 327w
Overseas aid 232w
Proportional representation 595w
Radio, Licensing 90–1w

Libyan Arab Republic
Diplomatic relations 511–2w
Sanctions 503–4w, 512–3w
Trade promotion 503–4w

Licensing (Young Persons) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R adjourned (16.04.99) 534–40

***Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen**, Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office*
Questions
Class sizes, Scotland 183w, 282w
Education, Equipment 177w
Primary education, Scotland 182–3w, 310w
Schools, Scotland 213–5w
Schools, Textbooks 210–2w

Lidington, Mr David
Debates etc.
Children, Kidnapping (22.04.99) 1132–5
Questions
Food Standards Agency, Fees and charges 218w
Inland waterways, EC law 57w
Members, Correspondence 24w
Sports, Disabled 87w

Lifelong education
522w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 217–8
Lorries, Excise duties 221–2
Subsidiarity 406w

Limited liability
Barristers 429w
Solicitors 533w

Lincolnshire
Education 220

Linton, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 255, 264

Listed buildings
Religion 87–8w

Listening to women initiative
378–80w

Literacy
Budget March 1999 587w

Liver diseases
Medical treatments 723–4w
Northern Ireland 700w

Livestock industry
Opposition days (21.04.99) 974–1020
USA 393–4w

Livsey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 986, 997
Questions
Health authorities, Debts written off 129–33w
NHS trusts, Negligence 128–9w
Radioactive wastes, Wales 290w

Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Questions
Human rights, Annual reports 256w

Lloyd, Mr Tony, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
Colombia (14.04.99) 201–6
Leach, Carole, Homicide (14.04.99) 349–52
Questions
Arms trade, EC action 407w
Arms trade, Export controls 34w, 612–3w
Chechnya, Granger Telecom 256–7w, 383–4w
Colombia 508w
East Timor 684–6
Economic Community of West African States, Arms trade 341–2w
Environment protection 692–3
Export controls, Electronic surveillance 566w
Falkland Islands, Aviation 405–6w
Falkland Islands, Marine animals 693
Human rights, Annual reports 256w
International Criminal Court 510w
Iraq, Peace keeping operations 508w
Kashmir 683–4
Kosovo, Armed conflict 506w
Kosovo, Refugees 567w
Kosovo, War crimes 567–8w, 613w
Libyan Arab Republic, Sanctions 512–3w
Mercenaries 38w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 508w, 690–2
Military intervention 36w
Nigeria, Foreign relations 509w
Nuclear disarmament 568–9w
Pakistan, Foreign relations 507w
Pakistan, Visas 695
Peru, Prisoners' release 407w
Pinochet, Augusto 36w, 341w
Public appointments, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 383w
St Helena, Electricity generation 38w
Serbia, Foreign relations 611–2w
Sierra Leone, Human rights 568w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 35w
South Africa, Elections 341w
USA, Capital punishment 383w
USA, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 567w
Visas 695
Visas, Fees and charges 694–5
Yugoslavia, Treaties 612w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 984–5
Llwyd, Mr Elfyn—continued
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 828, 830–3
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 389–90, 417–22, 438
Questions
Incapacity benefit, Availability for work 457w
Meat Hygiene Service, Fees and charges 1035

Lobbying
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 88w
Dept for Education and Employment 170w
Dept for International Development 123–4w
Dept of Health 108w
Dept of Trade and Industry 367–8w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 34w
Home Office 14w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 29–30w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 222w
Northern Ireland Office 145w
President of the Council 29w
Treasury 120w
Welsh Office 500w, 698w

Local authorities
Housing 547w
Public relations 175–6w
Scotland 175–6w
Stocks and shares (22.04.99) 1131

Local Authority (Stocks and Bonds) (Amendment) Regulations 1999
Debates etc.
(22.04.99) 1131

Local government
Elections 583–4w
Ethics 53w

Local government finance
(20.04.99) 817
Rochford 18

Local government services
147w
Scotland 525w

Lock, Mr David
Questions
Caribbean, Overseas aid 232–3w
Dental services, Wyre Forest 725w
Lamotrigine 268–9w, 423–4w
Legal profession, Public appointments 1042

Lockerbie
Bombings 688–9

Log books
Fishing catches 222w

London
see Greater London

London Regional Transport
Assets 475w
Project Prestige 60w

London Underground
Fares 12
Investment 12–3, 620–1w
Joint ventures 474w
Standards 620w

Lone parents
Education 567
Employment 461w
Income support 151w
Social security benefits (23.04.99) 1212–6

Long term unemployed
Wales 499w

Long-Term Care Royal Commission
598w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99 604w
Environmental impact assessment 30w
Lobbying 29–30w
Public appointments 340w
Statistics 604w
Written questions 340w

Lorries
51–2w, 548–9w
Correspondence 427w
Environment protection 7–8
Excise duties 7–10, 49w, 52–3w, 221–2, 335–6w, 359–61, 427w, 547–8w, 904–5
Operating costs 549–50w
Opposition days (21.04.99) 915–73
Subsidies 548w

Lorry drivers
Demonstrations 483–4w

Loughton, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1081
Excise duties (21.04.99) 925, 928, 931–2, 936–7, 940, 942, 946–7, 951
Freedom of Tax Information Bill, 1R (20.04.99) 698–702
Questions
Food, Import controls 1031
Genetically modified organisms, Food 221w
Lorries, Excise duties 52–3w
Road traffic 299w
Stocks and shares, Stamp duties 617w

Love, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Medicine, Children (19.04.99) 669–73
Questions
Financial Services Authority 490w

Low incomes
Pensioners (21.04.99) 823–44

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 977, 990–1
Questions
Bypasses 544–5w
Common agricultural policy, Dairy farming 671w
Food Standards Agency, Fees and charges 1039–40
Kosovo 216–7
Milk Marque 95w
Nannies, Employment agencies 93w
Supermarkets 262–3w

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 235, 278, 283, 292, 315–20
Questions
Conditional fee agreements 534w
Crown Prosecution Service, Email 1041
Immigration, Advisory services 484–5w
Immigration Services Commissioner, Fees and charges 656–7w
Immigration Services Commissioner, Operating costs 657w
Immigration Services Tribunal, Operating costs 655–6w

McAllion, Mr John
Questions
Public records 33w

McCabe, Mr Stephen
Questions
Road traffic offences, Probation and aftercare 11–2w
Tax allowances, Maintenance 329w

McCafferty, Ms Chris
Debates etc.
Licensing (Young Persons) Bill, 2R adjourned (16.04.99) 534–7
Questions
Inter-American Development Bank, Poverty 233–4w

***McCartney, Rt Hon Ian**, Minister of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Carers, Minimum wage 452w
Directors, Pay 306–7w
Employment, Closed circuit television 92w
Minimum wage 94w
Nannies, Employment agencies 93w
Postal rates 96w
Working hours, EC law 453–4w

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Questions
Social security benefits, Abuse 556–7

***Macdonald, Mr Calum**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office*
Questions
EC grants and loans, Scotland 208–10w, 570–1w
EC grants and loans, Scottish Office 197–8w
Environmental impact assessment, Scottish Office 195w
Fish diseases, Scotland 572–3w
Fishing, Scotland 574w, 701–2w
Fishing vessels, Prosecutions 229w
Food and Agriculture Organisation, Scottish Office 572w
Genetically modified organisms, Salmon 525w
Greenbelt, Scotland 195–6w
Public expenditure, Glasgow 176w
Radioactive materials, Waste disposal 188–9w
Road traffic, Scotland 198w
Rural areas, Scotland 173–4w
Salmon, Scotland 573–4w
Seals, Scotland 702w
Subsidies, Scotland 573–4w
Sustainable development, Scotland 282–4w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Scottish Office 309w
Tree planting, Scotland 614w
Wood, Scotland 569–70w

McDonnell, Mr John
Questions
Performance appraisal, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 223–9w
Performance appraisal, Ministry of Defence 398w
Performance appraisal, Scottish Office 185–8w
Performance appraisal, Treasury 116–7w
Performance appraisal, Welsh Office 133–5w
Radioactive materials, Waste disposal 188–9w

Macedonia
Peace keeping operations 404w

***McFall, Mr John**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
Gaelic language, Schools 362–3w
Liver diseases, Northern Ireland 700w
Northern Ireland government 143–4w
Pre-school education, Northern Ireland 699–700w

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service 610w
Government departments, Intranets 602w

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Questions
Northern Ireland Assembly 535w
Police, Northern Ireland 535–6w

Mackinlay, Mr Andrew
Questions
Gibraltar 595w
Railways, Investment 14–5
Study of Parliament Group 303w

Maclean, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 472, 474–6, 481, 483, 487–8, 493–4, 499, 503–4, 517, 529–33
Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill, 2R adjourned (23.04.99) 1205, 1207
Licensing (Young Persons) Bill, 2R adjourned (16.04.99) 536
Questions
Armed forces, Young people 560–1w
Bank notes 493–4w
Crime prevention, Treasury 244w
EC Agriculture Council 291w
EC Environment Council 625w
EC Finance Council 119w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 342w
EC grants and loans 472w
EC Social Charter, Civil servants 402–3w
Electronic warfare, Wellington Barracks 561w
EU Justice and Home Affairs Council 12–3w, 258–9w
EU Justice and Home Affairs Council, Administrative delays 583w
Euro, Bank notes 494w
Food and Agriculture Organisation, Scottish Office 572w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 55–6w
Integrated administration and control system 290–1w, 318w, 390w
Kosovo, Territorial Army 561w
Kosovo, War crimes 567–8w
Kosovo Liberation Army, Surveillance 417–8w
Licensing, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 319w
Macedonia, Peace keeping operations 404w
Mediterranean region, EC external relations 127w
Myelography, Side effects 101w
NATO 564w
New deal for young people 678w
New deal schemes, Telephone services 159w
Newspaper press, Prime Minister 513w
Overseas trade, Scotland 176–7w
Pinochet, Augusto 594–5w
Political refugees, Kosovo 489w
Schengen Agreement 24w
Sierra Leone, Human rights 568w
Single market action plan 613–4w

***Maclean, Rt Hon David**—continued*
Small businesses, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 81–3w
Small businesses, Scottish Office 183w
Speeches, Ministers 38w
Working hours, EC law 453–4w
Written questions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 406w

***McLeish, Mr Henry**, Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office*
Questions
Administration of justice, Scotland 189–90w
Children, Hamilton 204w
Closed circuit television, Scotland 203–4w
Crime prevention, Scotland 207–8w
Criminal proceedings, Scotland 190w
Drug treatment and testing orders, Scotland 202w
Local authorities, Public relations 175–6w
Local government services, Scotland 525w
Market research, Scottish Office 174–6w
Mortgages, Repossession orders 177–82w
Opinion polls, Scotland 212w
Police, Ethnic groups 198–9w
Police, Finance 205–6w
Police, Scotland 203w, 207w
Police, Training 202w
Prison accommodation, Scotland 207w
Prison sentences, Scotland 204–5w
Prisoners, Scotland 206–7w
Prisons, Drugs 203w
Public opinion, Scotland 212–3w
Repossession orders, Scotland 184–5w
Riot control weapons, Scotland 614w
Scottish Office Home Dept 284w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Scottish Office 366w

Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Questions
Children, Poverty 567
Millennium Exhibition, Publications 303–4w

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Orders and regulations motions (20.04.99) 816
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 143
Questions
East Midlands Electricity, Correspondence 504w
Education, Expenditure 343w
Legal Aid Board, Sick leave 603w
School meals, Derbyshire 167–8w
Schools, Catering 168w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Hunting, Petitions (16.04.99) 469
Questions
Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99, Lord Chancellor's Dept 604w
Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99, Treasury 586w
Administration of justice, Personal records 359w
Armed forces, Convictions 40w
Armed forces, Personal records 370–1w
Arrest warrants, Northern Ireland 363–4w
Clegg, Lee, Legal costs 42–3w
Credit unions, Shares 619–20w
Davies, Nicholas, Injunctions 373–4w
Equal opportunities, Northern Ireland 364–5w
Exservicemen, Injuries 324w
Finucane, Patrick, Homicide 470w
Firearms, Northern Ireland 359–60w, 606–8w, 721–2w

McNamara, Mr Kevin—*continued*
Firearms, Theft 584–5w
Firearms, Training 585w, 631w
Gaelic language, Schools 362–3w
Listed buildings, Religion 87–8w
Local government, Elections 583–4w
Maghaberry Prison, Sick leave 469–70w
Maghaberry Prison, Violence 364w
Police, Northern Ireland 535w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Northern Ireland Office 361–2w

McNulty, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1163–9, 1186, 1188
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 527–8
Kosovo (19.04.99) 583

MacPherson of Cluny Inquiry
see Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry

MacShane, Denis
Le Monde Diplomatique 611w

MacShane, Mr Denis
Debates etc.
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 139–44, 148, 155–6
Questions
Business questions 382–3
Excise duties, Alcoholic drinks 618–9w
International Labour Organisation, World Trade Organisation 231w
Taxation, Pollution control 725w

Mactaggart, Fiona
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 307–8, 324
Questions
Kosovo, Refugees 701w, 711–2w
Pakistan, Foreign relations 507w
Woodstead, Chris 382w
Working families tax credit 326w

Maghaberry Prison
Sick leave 469–70w
Violence 364w

Magistrates' courts
29w
Stow-on-the-Wold 429w

Mahon, Alice
Serbia 905

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 31–2, (19.04.99) 616–9
Members' interests, Points of order (21.04.99) 909
Questions
Meteorological Office 48w
Pinochet, Augusto 311–6w

Maintenance
Children 329w, 616–7w
Tax allowances 329w, 616–7w

Maize
Genetically modified organisms 715–6w

Malaysia
Armed forces 562w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Debates etc.
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 450–5
Questions
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Administrative delays 490w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Telephone services 5–6w

Manchester Airport
Manchester Metrolink 16
Roads 16–7

Manufacturing industries
Production 555w

Maples, Mr John
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 657–63

Marek, Dr John
Questions
Gibraltar, European Parliament elections 569w
Packaging, Waste disposal 75w
St Helena, Electricity generation 38w

Marine animals
Falkland Islands 693

Mark
Exchange rates 251w

Market research
Scottish Office 174–6w

Marsden, Mr Gordon
Questions
Developing countries, Debts written off 236w

Marsden, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Cancer Care Bill, 1R (14.04.99) 228–9
Questions
Cancer 248w
Cancer, Death rate 248–50w
Cancer, Information services 647–8w
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, Radiotherapy 108w
West coast railway line, Standards 75w

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Public expenditure, Glasgow 176w

Marshall, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 32
Questions
Nature Conservancy Council for England 260w

Marshall-Andrews, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 232, 235, 260–7

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 956
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 980, 1011

Materials handling equipment
Licensing 624w

Maternity services
Scotland 193w

Maternity Services Multidisciplinary Working Party
423w

Mature students
Housing benefit 465w

Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Questions
Taxation, Business 353–4

Mauritania
Fishery agreements 517w

Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Questions
Prostitution, Advertising 669w

Maxton, Mr John
Debates etc.
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 143–6

May, Mrs Theresa
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1061, 1067–76, 1107
Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, Money res (14.04.99) 341, 343–4
Questions
Incapacity benefit 555–6
Listening to women initiative 378–80w
Manpower, Dept for Education and Employment 254–5w
National grid for learning, Finance 170–1w
Rural action initiative 549–50w

Meacher, Rt Hon Michael, Minister for the Environment, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Questions
Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment 623–4w
Countryside, Access 53w, 58w
Countryside Agency 413w, 630w
EC Environment Council 625w
Energy, Conservation 80–1w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 56w, 229w, 259w, 301–2w, 368w, 411w, 550w, 702–4w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 55–6w
Genetically modified organisms, Grazing land 473w
Genetically modified organisms, Monmouthshire 49–50w, 477w
Genetically modified organisms, Salmon 627w
Packaging, EC action 412–3w
Packaging, Waste disposal 75w
Pesticides 413w
Planning, Inspections 80w, 620w
Rivers, Access 65w
Secondment, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 546–7w
Sites of special scientific interest 11–2
Wild animals, Protection 61w
Wild ducks, Pest control 410w

Meale, Mr Alan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Debates etc.
Railway stations, Disabled (14.04.99) 185–8
Sites of special scientific interest (14.04.99) 175–80
Questions
Advisory bodies, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 57–8w, 80w
Air pollution, Monitoring 409–10w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 627–8w
Birds, Licensing 74w
Dolphins 477w
Electronic equipment, Industrial health and safety 478–9w
Energy, Conservation 625–7w
Environmental impact assessment, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 66w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 299–300w
Fuel poverty, Pensioners 78–9w, 477–8w
GJW Government Relations, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 415w
Hedges and ditches, Conservation 63w

***Meale, Mr Alan**—continued*
Industrial health and safety, European Scrutiny Committee 69w
Industrial health and safety, Noise 282w
KPMG, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 625w
Lead, EC action 54w
Nature Conservancy Council for England 260w
New Forest 6–7
Noise, Pollution control 301w
Office of Water Services, Environment protection 58–9w
Public appointments, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 300w
Radioactive materials, Waste disposal 77w
Regional development agencies 475–6w
Regional government, Eastern region 62–4w
Rural action initiative 549–50w
Sellafield, Mixed oxide fuel 76–7w
Sewers 79w
Sewers, Pest control 79–80w
Sewers, Standards 79w
Solvents, Health hazards 479w
Speed limits, Lake Windermere 415w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 408w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 75w
Water, Meters 475w
Water charges 624–5w
Water companies 476w
Water companies, Consumer protection 59w
Water supply 70w
Written questions, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 301w

Means tested benefits
553–4
Applications 561
Pensioners 156–7w, 554, 560–1

Meat
Hygiene 1034
Inspections 1034–5

Meat Hygiene Service
Fees and charges 223–4w, 445w, 1035

Meat products
Waste disposal 674w

Medical examinations
457w

Medical profession
Training 902–3

Medical records
652w

Medical treatments
Liver diseases 723–4w

Medicines (Advertising and Monitoring of Advertising) Regulations 1999
Debates etc.
(14.04.99) 345

Medicines Control Agency
Standards 544w

Mediterranean region
EC external relations 127w

Medway Secure Training Centre
8–9w

Members
Correspondence 24w, 387w, 404w, 415w
National Assembly for Wales 730w

Membership
World Tourism Organisation 578w

Men
see Males

Mental health
Exservicemen 324w

Mental Health Act 1983
Questions
14–5w
Police 15w

Mental health services
543–4w
Ethnic groups 287w, 543w
Finance 543w
Wales 136–7w, 286–8w, 695–7w

Mental patients
Death 108–9w
Restraint techniques 109w, 374w

Mentally ill
Community care 107w
Disability living allowance 465–6w
Drugs 696–7w
Social security benefits 556

Mercenaries
38w

Merron, Ms Gillian
Questions
Education, Lincolnshire 220

Meteorological Office
48w

Meters
Water 475w

Methadone
377w, 893

Methyl amphetamines
Drug seizures 579–80w

***Michael, Rt Hon Alun**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Questions
Advisory bodies, Welsh Office 499–500w
CADW Welsh Historic Monuments, Standards 698w
Community health councils, Wales 501w
Council tax capping, Wales 697–8w
Economic and monetary union, Task forces 500–1w
Economic and monetary union, Wales 728w
Fares, Wales 502–3w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 730w
Lobbying, Welsh Office 500w, 698w
National Assembly for Wales, Pay 286w
National Assembly for Wales, Standing orders 290w
Performance appraisal, Welsh Office 133–5w
Poland, Overseas investment 135w
Public appointments, Welsh Office 336w
Public expenditure, Welsh Office 135w
Statistics, Welsh Office 729w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Welsh Office 597w
Written questions, Welsh Office 336w

Michie, Mr Bill
Questions
Transport, Sustainable development 55w

Microcredit programmes
Developing countries 234w

Middle East
Peace negotiations 508w, 690–2

Middlesbrough
Crime 486w

***Middlesbrough**—continued*
Education 164w
Schools 166w

***Milburn, Rt Hon Alan**, Chief Secretary to the Treasury*
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 923–33, 938
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 703–10
Questions
Bus Employees' Superannuation Trust 119–20w
Capital investment, Treasury 120w
Coalfields Task Force, Regional aid 368–70
Economic situation 353
Excise duties, Lorries 427w
Government departments, Operating costs 590w
Income tax, Tax credit 330w
National Insurance Fund 325w
Public expenditure 495w
Public sector debt 326w
Speed limits, Cameras 618w
Taxation, Business 353–4
Taxation, Small businesses 354

Military Actions Against Iraq (Parliamentary Approval) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
(16.04.99) 541

Military aircraft
44w

Military exercises
Central Europe 371w
Turkey 240w

Military intelligence
47w

Military intervention
36w

Milk
Imports 321–2w

Milk Marque
95w, 220w, 674w

Millennium
Health services 274–5w

Millennium compliance
Aviation 75–6w
Financial institutions 357–8
Insurance companies 707w
Ministry of Defence 242–3w
NHS 271w
Offshore industry 553–5w
Publicity 480–1w

Millennium Exhibition
Catering 83–4w
Educational visits 273–4w, 305w
Engineering 274w
Environment protection 272–3w
Public transport 274w
Publications 303–4w
Sponsorship 577–8w

Millennium Fund
83w

Millennium landmark projects
481w, 637w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Roads, Accidents (20.04.99) 819, 821

Minesweepers
46w

Minimum wage
94w
Carers 452w
Jobcentres 169–70w

Ministerial policy advisors
897
Pay 339–40w

Ministerial statements
Kosovo (13.04.99) 19–33

Ministers
Bus services 17
Speeches 38w
Trade promotion 91–2w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
Advisory bodies 515w
Environmental impact assessment 222–3w
Ethnic groups 514w
Licensing 319w
Lobbying 222w
Performance appraisal 223–9w
Public appointments 517w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 391w
Treaty of Amsterdam 393w
Visits abroad 319w
Written questions 322w

Ministry of Defence
Environmental impact assessment 42w
European Court of Human Rights 41w
Housing 323w
Internet 45–6w
KPMG 400w
Millennium compliance 242–3w
Performance appraisal 398w
Public appointments 324w
Rescue services 372w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 325w
USA 631w
Visits abroad 559w
Written questions 324w

Ministry of Defence Police
Conditions of employment 41–2w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 235–6, 250, 287–91
Questions
Cabinet, Committees 596w
Economic and monetary union, Exchange rates 118w
European Legislation Select Committee 275w
Exchange rates, Mark 251w
Fisheries, Fees and charges 672w
Fishing vessels, Regulation 296w
France, Treaty of Amsterdam 568w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 216–7w, 703–4w
Genetically modified organisms, Grazing land 473w
Millennium Exhibition, Publications 303–4w
People's panel, Environmental health 889–90
Treaty of Amsterdam, Cabinet Office 146–7w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 481–2w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept for Education and Employment 381w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept for International Development 127–8w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept of Health 269w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept of Social Security 152w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 75w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 38w, 406w

Mitchell, Mr Austin*—*continued
Treaty of Amsterdam, Home Office 417w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 393w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Northern Ireland Office 359–60w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Scottish Office 309w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Treasury 727w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Welsh Office 286w
Urinary system, Diseases 422w
Yugoslavia, Treaties 612w

Mixed oxide fuel
Sellafield 76–7w

MMR vaccine
110–2w, 654–5w

Mobile homes
78w, (21.04.99) 845–61

Modernisation of the House of Commons Select Committee
(16.04.99) 542

Modernising government programme
Publicity 531–2w

"Modernising Government White Paper"
601w

Moffatt, Laura
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 108–9

Monetary Policy Committee
169w

Monitoring
Air pollution 409–10w

Monmouthshire
Genetically modified organisms 49–50w, 477w
Slaughterhouses 1035

Montserrat
Refugees 124w

Monuments
World War II (21.04.99) 876–81

Moore, Mr Michael
Questions
Institutional care, Scotland 570w

Moran, Ms Margaret
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 937, 941
Mortgages, Codes of practice (15.04.99) 462
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 433–4, 442–6
Questions
Children, Abuse 3w
Kashmir 683–4
Offences against children, Prosecutions 26–7w

Morgan, Mr Alasdair
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 29
Questions
Millennium compliance, Aviation 75–6w

Morgan, Ms Julie
Questions
Armed forces, Malaysia 562w
Armed forces, Training 632w
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 338w
Dental services, Wales 137w
Depressive illnesses, Wales 288w
Mental health services, Wales 136–7w, 286–8w, 695–7w

***Morley, Mr Elliot**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 1010
Questions
Advisory bodies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 515w
Agriculture, Biodiversity 391w
Agriculture, Land 296w
Common agricultural policy, Dairy farming 671w
EC Fisheries Council 221w
Environmental impact assessment, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 222–3w
Farmers, Diversification 1035–6
Farmers, Personal income 671w
Farmers, Regulation 673w
Fisheries 674w, 1030
Fisheries, Fees and charges 672w
Fisheries, Fleetwood 1029
Fisheries, Irish Sea 1029–30
Fisheries, Scotland 215–6w
Fishery agreements, Africa 517w
Fishery agreements, Mauritania 517w
Fishing, Rivers 518–9w
Fishing vessels 220w
Fishing vessels, Inspections 222w
Fishing vessels, Regulation 296w
Fishing vessels, Satellites 221–2w
Flood control, Great Yarmouth 1027
Flood control, Leicestershire 1028
Flood control, River Derwent 593w, 1027–8
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 673w
Internal drainage boards 396w
Lobbying, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 222w
Milk Marque 674w
New Forest Foxhounds 514–5w
Organic aid scheme 518w
Performance appraisal, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 223–9w
Pigmeat, Imports 217w
Pigs 672w
Poultry 519w
Public appointments, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 517w
Ragwort, Weed control 220w
Sandeels, Research 517w
Seals 517w
Sheep, Exports 1036
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 391w
Written questions, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 322w

***Morris, Ms Estelle**, Minister for School Standards, Dept for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (21.04.99) 868, 872–5
Questions
Class sizes 345–9w, 381–2w
Class sizes, Primary education 436–44w
Class sizes, Reception classes 349–55w
Curriculum, Science 165w
Education, Expenditure 343w
Education, Finance 255w, 678–82w
Education, Middlesbrough 164w
Education, Temporary immigrants 254w
Education action zones 435w
Education action zones, Government departments 435–6w
Grant maintained schools, Finance 431–2w
Manpower, Dept for Education and Employment 254–5w

***Morris, Ms Estelle**—continued*
Primary education, Per capita costs 380–1w
Pupil exclusions 714w
Rainsford School Chelmsford 444w
School meals, Derbyshire 167–8w
Schools, Catering 168w
Schools, Finance 356–8w, 432w, 717w
Schools, Middlesbrough 166w
Schools, Textbooks 343w
Secondary education, Havering 713–4w
Secondary education, Pupils 695w
Teachers 165w
Teachers, Ethnic groups 162–3w
Teachers, Pay 161–2w, 165w, 344w
Village schools 173w

***Morris, Rt Hon John**, Attorney-General*
Questions
Children, Abuse 3w
Crown Prosecution Service 397–8w
Crown Prosecution Service, Disclosure of information 4w
Crown Prosecution Service, Ethnic groups 3w
Crown Prosecution Service, Freemasonry 4w, 699w
Ethnic groups, Attorney General 3w
Racial violence, Hammersmith and Fulham 3w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Attorney General 397w

Mortgage relief
Scotland 121w

Mortgages
Codes of practice (15.04.99) 460–8
Repossession orders 177–82w
Scotland 177–82w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Publicity, Northern Ireland Office 138w

Motability
637–9w

Motor Accident Injury Compensation Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (16.04.99) 542

Motor vehicles
Databases 69w
EC action 450w
Excise duties 492–3w, 545w
Licensing 408w
Public footpaths (21.04.99) 882–8
Taxation 359
Unleaded petrol 300w

Motorcycles
259–60w, 550–1w

Mountford, Kali
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 916, 925
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 785–8

***Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie**, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland*
Questions
Ethnic groups, Northern Ireland Office 138–9w
Finucane, Patrick, Homicide 470w
Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres, Annual reports 699w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Northern Ireland Office 359–60w
Written questions, Northern Ireland Office 306w

***Mudie, Mr George**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Employment*
Questions
Advisory bodies, Dept for Education and Employment 163w
Apprentices 171w
Consultation papers, Dept for Education and Employment 714–5w
Edexcel Foundation 171–2w
Further education, Headteachers 173w, 559w
Lifelong education 522w
Lobbying, Dept for Education and Employment 170w
Manpower, Dept for Education and Employment 558w
Monetary Policy Committee 169w
Open University, Student numbers 557w
Proof of identity, Dept for Education and Employment 165–6w
Public appointments, Dept for Education and Employment 382w
Schools, Finance 172w
Skyline College, Censorship 253w
Statistics, Dept for Education and Employment 713–4w
Student numbers, Herefordshire 171w, 558w
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 715w
University for Industry, Environment protection 168–9w
USA, Dept for Education and Employment 558w
Wirral Metropolitan College 172w, 558–9w, 717–8w
Written questions, Dept for Education and Employment 343w
Youth services 170w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 240, 265
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 147
Questions
Charities, Fund raising 24–6w
Crown Prosecution Service, Freemasonry 699w
Judiciary, Complaints 603–4w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 680–1
Police, Freemasonry 712w

Multiple sclerosis
376–7w, 423w
Research 648–50w

***Murphy, Rt Hon Paul**, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
Advisory bodies, Northern Ireland Office 139–41w
Economic and monetary union, Northern Ireland 359w
Environmental impact assessment, Northern Ireland Office 276w
Greenbelt, Northern Ireland 145w
Hypothermia, Northern Ireland 141–3w
Information officers, Northern Ireland Office 276w
Lobbying, Northern Ireland Office 145w
MV Lough Foyle, Pay 605w
Northern Ireland Assembly 535w
Northern Ireland Roads Service 470w
Public appointments, Northern Ireland Office 360w
Publicity, Northern Ireland Office 138w
Statistics, Northern Ireland Office 537–8w

Museums and galleries
Educational visits 81w

MV Gaul
Accidents 369–70w

MV Lough Foyle
Pay 605w

Myelography
Side effects 101w

Nannies
Employment agencies 93w

National Assembly for Wales
Members 730w
Pay 286w
Standing orders 290w

National carers' strategy
568

National cycling strategy
414w

National debt
495w

National Family and Parenting Institute
482w

National Forest
Railways 223

National grid for learning
Finance 170–1w

National Institute for Clinical Excellence
544w
Disabled 380w

National insurance
Fraud 586–7w

National insurance contributions
358–9, 387–90w, 617w

National Insurance Contributions Unit
see Social Security Contributions Agency

National Insurance Fund
325w

National Lottery
English Sports Council 89–90w
Sports 275w

National Meat Hygiene Service
see Meat Hygiene Service

National Rail Summit
414w

NATO
564w
Nuclear weapons 562–3w

Nature Conservancy Council for England
260w

Navigation
River Wye 286w

Navy
Animal experiments 243–4w, 719–21w
Deployment 723w
Drugs 370w

Naysmith, Dr Douglas
Questions
Developing countries, Debts written off 214–5

Negligence
529w
NHS trusts 128–9w

Nelson, Rosemary
2w

Neurology
270w
Standards 529w

"New and Renewable Energy Consultation Paper"
287–8w

New deal for disabled people
523w, 559, 564–5

New deal for young people
169–70w, 253–4w, 355w, 432–4w, 677–8w, 717–8w
Complaints 557w
Qualifications 170w
Single benefit gateway 523w, 677–8w
Vocational training 255w

New deal schemes
Greater London 163–4w
Single benefit gateway 159–60w
Telephone services 159w
Training 715–7w

New Forest
6–7

New Forest Foxhounds
514–5w

New Opportunities Fund
Correspondence 397w

New Zealand
Dairy products 295–6w

Newhaven
Ports 66w

Newspaper press
Prime Minister 513w

NHS
Classification schemes 270–1w
Food Standards Agency 725w
Income 641w
Millennium compliance 271w
Pensions 654w, 892
Suffolk 654w

NHS Direct
Back pain 652w

NHS trusts
Negligence 128–9w
Public appointments 377w
Wales 128–9w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Questions
Fisheries 1030

Nigeria
Foreign relations 509w

Noise
A449 728w
Industrial health and safety 282w
Pollution control 301w
Roads 72–3w

Non-domestic rates
Wales 138w, 289w

Non-governmental organisations
Disaster relief 471w
Overseas aid 123w
Sri Lanka 126w

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
see NATO

North East region
Regional government 14

North West region
Regional development agencies 53w

North Western Trains
see First North Western Trains

Northern Ireland
Administration of justice 359w
Alternative energy 360w
Arrest warrants 363–4w
Beef 321w
Crimes of violence 144w, 536–7w
Economic and monetary union 359w
Equal opportunities 364–5w

Northern Ireland*—*continued
Euro 143w
Firearms 359–60w, 606–8w, 721–2w
Foreign investment in UK 143w
Gaelic language 362–3w
Greenbelt 145w
Hypothermia 141–3w
Liver diseases 700w
Police 535–6w
Pre-school education 699–700w
Prisoners' release 224
Riot control weapons 537w
Victims' Liaison Unit 472–3w
Weapons 220

Northern Ireland Assembly
535w

Northern Ireland government
143–4w, 225

Northern Ireland Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres
see Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres

Northern Ireland Office
Advisory bodies 139–41w
Environmental impact assessment 145w, 276w
Ethnic groups 138–9w
Information officers 276w
Lobbying 145w
Public appointments 360w
Publicity 138w
Statistics 537–8w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 361–2w, 467–9w
Treaty of Amsterdam 359–60w
Written questions 306w

Northern Ireland Roads Service
470w

Nuclear disarmament
568–9w

Nuclear fuel reprocessing
Japan 451–2w

Nuclear weapons
Accidents 372w
Civil defence 42w
NATO 562–3w
Public expenditure 563w
Serbia 217

Nurseries
Wales 597w

Nurses
Training 422w, 527w
Wales 598w

Nursing homes
Catering 530w

Nutrition
Children 642–5w

Oaten, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1140–5, 1147, 1152, 1166–7, 1179, 1202
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1064, 1072, 1088, 1090–5
Questions
Building regulations 480w
Disability living allowance 462w
Disability living allowance, Hearing impaired 462–4w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence, Disabled 380w

O'Brien, Mr Mike, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Questions
Deportation 578–9w, 668–9w
Environmental impact assessment, Home Office 415w
"Fairer Faster Firmer White Paper" 16w
Illegal immigrants 6–7w
Immigrants, Crime 667w
Immigrants, Detainees 666–7w
Immigration, Advisory services 484–5w
Immigration, Appeals 667w
Immigration, Applications 666w, 670w
Immigration, Guarantees 670w
Immigration, Latvia 14w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 485w, 663w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Administration 662w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Administrative delays 6w, 490w, 664–5w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Buildings 664–5w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Croydon 710w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Manpower 664w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Productivity 663w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Resignations 485–6w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Siemens Business Services 664w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Standards 485w, 663w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Telephone services 5–6w, 663w
Immigration controls, Manpower 9–10w
Immigration Services Commissioner, Fees and charges 656–7w
Immigration Services Commissioner, Operating costs 657w
Immigration Services Tribunal, Operating costs 655–6w
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 665–6w
Kosovo, Refugees, 488w, 640w, 711w
Members, Correspondence 24w, 415w
Political refugees, Kosovo 489w
Political refugees, Voucher schemes 667–8w
Political refugees, Waterloo Station 670w
Political refugees, Yugoslavia 665w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 828–30

Occupational pensions
279–80w, 465w
Widowed people 464–5w

OECD countries
Pensioners 640w

Offences against children
Prosecutions 26–7w

Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments
see Public Appointments Commissioner

Office of the Public Appointments Commissioner
see Public Appointments Commissioner

Office of the Social Security Commissioners
see Social Security Commissioners

Office of Water Services
Environment protection 58–9w

Official engagements
597w
Treasury 496w

Offshore industry
Millennium compliance 553–5w

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 833–5

Older workers
Employment schemes 556w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Questions
Capital allowances, Small businesses 427w

Open University
Student numbers 557w

Ophthalmic services
Elderly 531w

Opik, Mr Lembit
Questions
Beef, Wales 599w
Rain, Wales 336w
Wind power, Wales 287w
Wood, Scotland 183–4w, 569–70w

Opinion polls
Scotland 212w

Opposition days
Excise duties (21.04.99) 915–73
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 974–1020
Lorries (21.04.99) 915–73

Orange badge scheme
68–9w

Organ, Mrs Diana
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 938
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 672w

Organic aid scheme
518w

Organic farming
445w

Osborne, Ms Sandra
Questions
Quarantine 670w

Ottaway, Mr Richard
Questions
Greater London Authority, Buildings 477w
London Underground, Investment 12–3

Out of town shopping centres
Wales 597–8w

Out-patients
Scotland 191–3w

Overseas aid
212–3, 232w, 236w
Accountability 208
Albania 576w
Cambodia 576w
Caribbean 232–3w
Cuba 209
Education 235–6w
Indonesia 387w
Kosovo 232w, 576w
Non-governmental organisations 123w
Sierra Leone 35w, 231w
Zimbabwe 207, 235w

Overseas investment
Poland 135w

Overseas residence
Armed conflict 559–60w

Overseas trade
Developing countries 208–9

***Overseas trade**—continued*
Scotland 176–7w
USA 93–4w

Packaging
EC action 412–3w
Waste disposal 75w

Page, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Cervical cancer (16.04.99) 543–6
Questions
Self-employed contributions 358

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 648–51
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 1009–12
Questions
Arable area payments scheme 593–4w
Beef, Northern Ireland 321w
Sheep, Exports 1036
Subsidies, Scotland 573–4w
Suckler cow premiums 445–6w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Questions
Nelson, Rosemary 2w
Victims' Liaison Unit, Northern Ireland 472–3w

Pakistan
Foreign relations 507w
Visas 695

Palmer, Dr Nick
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1145–9
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 506w
Overseas aid 236w
Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 605w
Sites of special scientific interest 12

Papua New Guinea
511w

Parental responsibility
602–3w

Parking
Planning 59w

Parliament
Broadcasting (14.04.99) 139–60

Parliament Square
Demonstrations 27–8w

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration
601w, 889

Passengers
Bus services 17, 629–30w
Railways 629w

Patterson, Mr Owen
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 918–9, 925–6, 931, 934, 952–6, 959, 964
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 978, 992
Questions
Business questions 383
Excise duties, Lorries 359–60
Falkland Islands, Marine animals 693

PAYE
617w

Peace keeping operations
Iraq 323w, 508w
Macedonia 404w

Peace negotiations
Middle East 508w, 690–2

Pearson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 740, 750, 763–6
Questions
Chemical Weapons Act 1996 267w
Consumer councils 263–7w
Gas fired power stations, Baglan Bay 268w
Taxation, Small businesses 354

Peers' interests
Sainsbury of Turville, Lord 446–8w

Pendry, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 479–84

Pensioners
155w, 461w
Fuel poverty 78–9w, 477–8w
Health services 530–1w
Income support 277–8w, 521w
Income tax 118–9w, 330w
Investment income 156w
Low incomes (21.04.99) 823–44
Means tested benefits 156–7w, 554, 560–1
OECD countries 640w
Personal income 592w, 640w
Social security benefits 521–2w
Tax credit 118w

Pensions
151w, 279w, 329w, 385–6w, 551–2, 562–3, 568–70
Advisory services 279w
NHS 654w, 892
Reform 157w
Widowed people 151w

People's panel
166w, 638w
Environmental health 889–90

Performance appraisal
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 223–9w
Ministry of Defence 398w
Scottish Office 185–8w
Treasury 116–7w
Welsh Office 133–5w

Performance related pay
Social Security Benefits Agency 708w

Perham, Ms Linda
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1108–10, 1124

Perjury
Convictions 662w

Personal income
Farmers 671w
Pensioners 592w, 640w

Personal records
Administration of justice 359w
Armed forces 370–1w

Personal savings
615–6w
Income tax 355–6
Social security benefits 278–9w

Pertussis vaccine
539–40w

Peru
Prisoners' release 407w

Pest control
Sewers 79–80w
Wild ducks 410w

Pesticides
413w

***Pesticides**—continued*
Insects 516w
Research 516–7w
Taxation 328w
Waste disposal 519–20w

Petitions
Hunting (16.04.99) 469

Petrol
Excise duties 115w, 118w
VAT 115w

Petrol alternatives
Garages and petrol stations 17–8, 624w

Pharmacy
Pay 114w
Scotland 571–2w

Pickles, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, Money res (14.04.99) 342–3
Questions
Construction, Standards 2–3
Social security benefits, Abuse 558

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Questions
Speed limits, Lake Windermere 415w

Pigmeat
391–2w
Catering 394w
Imports 217w, 518w
Rendering industry 318–9w

Pigs
672w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 498–501
Kosovo (13.04.99) 31
Questions
Animal welfare 1031
Depressive illnesses 650w
Individual savings accounts 363
Means tested benefits, Applications 561
Mental health services 543–4w
Mental health services, Ethnic groups 543w
Mental health services, Finance 543w
Pakistan, Visas 695
Youth services 170w
Zimbabwe, Poverty 207–8

Pilot schemes
Dept of Health 97–100w

Pinochet, Augusto
36w, 311–6w, 341w, 419w, 594–5w
Rulings and statements (23.04.99) 1139

Planning
Inspections 80w, 620w
Parking 59w
Private finance initiative 410–1w
Water 61w

Planning Appeals Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (23.04.99) 1210

Planning permission
Rotherham 549w
Wales 288–9w

Plaskitt, Mr James
Questions
Lorries 51w

Poland
Overseas investment 135w

Police
9w
***Police**—continued*
Efficiency scrutinies 9w
Ethnic groups 21w, 198–9w
Finance 7–8w, 205–6w
Freemasonry 712w
Hammersmith and Fulham 21w
Lancashire (21.04.99) 1021–6
Mental Health Act 1983 15w
Northern Ireland 535–6w
Scotland 198–9w, 202–3w, 205–7w
Training 14–5w, 202w

Police authorities
Public appointments 712w

Police Scientific Development Branch
Publications 486–8w

Political activities
Regional development agencies 704–6w

Political Honours Scrutiny Committee
472w

Political impartiality
European Commission 2w
Public appointments 891

Political refugees
Kosovo 489w
Voucher schemes 667–8w
Waterloo Station 670w
Yugoslavia 665w

Politics and government
Cuba 210

Polling stations
Access 418–9w

Pollution control
Carbon dioxide 368–9w
Noise 301w
Taxation 725w

Pond, Mr Chris
Questions
Countryside Agency 630w
Disability living allowance 461w
Shipping, Drunkenness 63–4w

Portland
Prisons 418w

Ports
Newhaven 66w

Post offices
Social security benefits 153–4w, 639–40w

Postal rates
96w

Postal workers
Vacancies 253w

Potatoes
USA 296w

Poultry
519w

Pound, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1184–7
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 155–6
Questions
Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserves' Association 565–6w

Poverty
Children 244–5w, 459w, 567
Inter-American Development Bank 233–4w
Taxation 328w
UNESCO 235w
Zimbabwe 207–8

Pregnancy
Armed forces 41w

Prentice, Ms Bridget
Debates etc.
Railway stations, Disabled (14.04.99) 182
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 506w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Digital Television Broadcasting Bill, 1R (21.04.99) 913
Kosovo (19.04.99) 578
Questions
Acquittals 1042–3
Army, Food 562w
British citizenship, Ceremonies 485w
Channel tunnel railway line 411w
Computer viruses, Government departments 146w
Doctors, Hygiene 113w
Electoral systems 238w
Housing, Local authorities 547w
Housing benefit 562
Local government services 147w
National Institute for Clinical Excellence 544w
Overseas aid, Education 235–6w
Petrol alternatives, Garages and petrol stations 17–8, 624w

Pre-school education
Northern Ireland 699–700w

***Prescott, Rt Hon John**, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment Transport and the Regions*
Questions
A505 71w
Class sizes 218–9
Conservative Party, Contributions 224
Council tax, Bournemouth 226
Council tax capping 50–1w
Education, Lincolnshire 220
Inland waterways, Scotland 221
Kosovo 216–7, 225
Kosovo, Armed conflict 217–9
Kosovo, War crimes 219
Kvaerner Govan, Shipbuilding 218
Lancaster, Business 219–20
Lorries, Excise duties 221–2
MV Gaul, Accidents 369–70w
National Forest, Railways 223
Prisoners' release, Northern Ireland 224
Public transport 55w
Railtrack, Investment 4–5
Railways, Freight 4, 52w, 77w
Railways, Standards 223–4
Serbia, Nuclear weapons 217
Visits abroad, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 57w
Weapons, Northern Ireland 220
Withholding tax 220–1

Prescription drugs
(13.04.99) 129–38
Fertility 101–3w

Prescriptions
Cystic fibrosis 380w

President of the Council
Lobbying 29w
Public appointments 302–3w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 466–7w
Written questions 302w

Prevention of Delay in Trials Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (23.04.99) 1210

***Primarolo, Ms Dawn**, Paymaster General*
Questions
Additional personal allowance 121–2w, 427w
Budget March 1999 588w
Budget March 1999, Equal opportunities 588w
Budget March 1999, Literacy 587w
Capital allowances, Small businesses 427w
Child care tax credit 425w
Conditions of employment 326–7w
Corporation tax 122w
Income tax 387–90w
Income tax, Pensioners 119w, 330w
Income tax, Tax rates and bands 121w
Inland Revenue, Correspondence 426w
Inland Revenue, Forms 426–7w
Inland Revenue, Standards 425–6w
Members, Correspondence 387w
Mortgage relief, Scotland 121w
National insurance, Fraud 586–7w
PAYE 617w
Self-assessment of tax, Wye Valley 614–6w
Tax allowances, Maintenance 329w, 616–7w
Tax burden 121w, 329–30w
Tax burden, Transport 328w
Tax exemption certificates 122w
Tax yields 327w
Taxation, Construction 365–6
Taxation, Energy 361–2
Taxation, Females 329w
Taxation, Information technology 366
Taxation, Leaflets 588w
Taxation, Poverty 328w
Taxation, Shipping 366–7
VAT, Clothing 588w
Withholding tax 326w
Working families tax credit 122w, 326w

Primary care groups
Councillors 424w
Wales 137–8w, 429–30w

Primary education
Class sizes 436–44w
Developing countries 237–8w
Per capita costs 380–1w
Scotland 182–3w, 310w

Prime Minister
Ethnic groups 238–9w
Newspaper press 513w
Visits abroad 1w

Prior, Mr David
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 1010
Questions
Lone parents, Education 567

Priority routes
Wandsworth 64w

Prison accommodation
Scotland 207w

Prison sentences
Scotland 204–5w

Prisoners
Alternative medicine 257–8w
Death 23–4w
Hepatitis 316–7w
Infectious diseases 23w
Scotland 206–7w

Prisoners on remand
419–20w

Prisoners' release
Northern Ireland 224
Peru 407w

Prisons
Disposable syringes 23w
Drugs 203w
Essex 317w
Portland 418w
Recruitment 710–1w
Scotland 203w

Private finance initiative
Hospitals 531w
Planning 410–1w

Privy Council Office Judicial Committee
Capital punishment 29w

Probation and aftercare
Road traffic offences 11–2w

Probation officers
Age 660w
Retirement 658–60w

Procedure Select Committee
(16.04.99) 542

Prodi, Romano
686–7

Productivity
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 663w

Project Prestige
London Regional Transport 60w

Proof of identity
Dept for Education and Employment 165–6w
Scottish Office 190w

Proportional representation
595w

Proscribed organisations
Arrests 139–40w

Prosecutions
Drugs 892–3
Fishing vessels 229w
Offences against children 26–7w

Prostitution
Advertising 669w

Public appointments
Ambassadors for British business 511w
Animal Procedures Committee 581–2w
BBC 1054–5
Cabinet Office 339w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 634–7w
Dept for Education and Employment 382w
Dept for International Development 317–8w
Dept of Health 338w
Dept of Social Security 308–9w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 300w
Dept of Trade and Industry 307w
European Commission 403w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 383w
Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust 375–6w
Home Office 655–6w
Judiciary 33w
Legal profession 1042
Lord Chancellor's Dept 340w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 517w
Ministry of Defence 324w
NHS trusts 377w
Northern Ireland Office 360w
Police authorities 712w
Political impartiality 891
President of the Council 302–3w
Scottish Office 309–10w
Social security appeal tribunals 148–9w
Treasury 493w
Welsh Office 336w

Public Appointments Commissioner
Recruitment 890–1

Public expenditure
495w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 34w
Glasgow 176w
Nuclear weapons 563w
Welsh Office 135w

Public footpaths
Motor vehicles (21.04.99) 882–8

Public House Names Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (16.04.99) 542, (23.04.99) 1211

Public inquiries
Administrative delays 338–9w
Heathrow Airport 69w

Public opinion
Government departments 599w
Scotland 212–3w

Public records
33w
Access 120w

Public relations
Local authorities 175–6w

Public sector debt
326w

Public sector net cash requirement
496w

Public service
145–6w

Public transport
55w
Disabled 52w
Grants 66w
Millennium Exhibition 274w
Rural areas 55w, 411–2w

Publications
Millennium Exhibition 303–4w
Police Scientific Development Branch 486–8w

Publicity
Millennium compliance 480–1w
Modernising government programme 531–2w
Northern Ireland Office 138w
Speed limits 473–4w

Pupil exclusions
714w

Pupils
Secondary education 695w

Quarantine
215w, 670w
Guide dogs 219w

***Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce**, Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Agenda 2000, EC enlargement 507w
Armenia 506–7w
BBC External Services, Finance 510w
EC budget 405w
EC common foreign and security policy, Disclosure of information 611w
EC enlargement 682–4
EC Foreign Affairs Council 342w
EC institutions 507w
EC institutions, Reform 509w
European Commission 686–8
European Commission, Disciplinary proceedings 509w
European Commission, Expenditure 611w

Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce*—*continued
France, International cooperation 405w
France, Treaty of Amsterdam 568w
Gibraltar, European Parliament elections 569w
Labour Liberal Democrats Joint Consultative Committee 340–1w
Prodi, Romano 686–7
Slovakia, Visas 37–8w
Speeches, Ministers 38w
Subsidiarity 406w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 38w, 406w
Written questions, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 342w

Quinn, Mr Lawrie
Questions
Farmers, Diversification 1035–6

Racial violence
Hammersmith and Fulham 3w, 21–2w

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 717–24, 752

Radio
Licensing 90–1w

Radioactive materials
Scotland 188–9w
Waste disposal 77w, 188–9w

Radioactive wastes
706–7w
Wales 290w

Radiotherapy
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital 108w

Ragwort
Weed control 220w

Railtrack
Investment 4–5, 413–4w

Railway network
Cheltenham 76w
Swindon 76w

Railway stations
Disabled (14.04.99) 181–8
Manpower 628w

Railway track
Electrification 73w

Railways
414w
Expenditure 479w
Freight 4, 52w, 77w
Investment 14–5
National Forest 223
Passengers 629w
Standards 54w, 223–4

Rain
Wales 336w

Rainsford School Chelmsford
444w

Rammell, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 928–9
Questions
Business questions 383–4
EC budget, Repayments 356–7
European Commission 687

Randall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 106–8
Questions
Countryside, Access 53w
Excise duties, Lorries 335–6w

Rape
Administration of justice 662w

Rape crisis centres
Finance 22w

Rapson, Mr Syd
Questions
Kosovo, Refugees 128w
Lorries, Excise duties 49w

Raynsford, Mr Nick*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Debates etc.
Housing, Gloucestershire (14.04.99) 193–7
Mobile homes (21.04.99) 855–61
Questions
Building regulations 480w
Building regulations, Environment protection 61w
Construction, Company liquidations 3
Construction, Standards 1–3
Council housing, Elderly 478w
Council housing, Rents 64–5w
Council housing, Smoke alarms 61–2w
Double glazing, Regulation 3
Gazumping 65w
Greater London Authority, Buildings 477w
Greenbelt 66w
Housing, Construction 78w
Housing, Essex 260w
Housing, Leasehold 260w
Housing, Local authorities 547w
Mobile homes 78w
Parking, Planning 59w
Planning permission, Rotherham 549w
Private finance initiative, Planning 410–1w
Sale West Race Course estate 412w
Shorthold tenancies 476–7w
Water, Planning 61w

Reception classes
Class sizes 349–55w

Recruitment
Prisons 710–1w
Public Appointments Commissioner 890–1

Recycled Content of Newsprint Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (23.04.99) 1210

Redditch
Advisory services 894–5

Reduced earnings allowance
Appeals 639w

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Questions
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Grants 448–9w
China 447w
Genetically modified organisms, Departmental responsibilities 449w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 707w
Pay, Employment 332w
Sainsbury of Turville, Lord, Peers' interests 446–8w

Reed, Mr Andrew
Questions
Flood control, Leicestershire 1028

Referendums
Economic and monetary union 327w

Refugees
Kosovo 128w, 401w, 421–2w, 488w, 567w, 576w, 640w, 669w, 701w, 711–2w, 907–8
Montserrat 124w

Refuges
Finance 22w

Reg(EEC)3975/87
(22.04.99) 1130

Regional aid
Coalfields Task Force 368–70

Regional airports
630w

Regional development agencies
475–6w
East Midlands 54w
Finance 545–6w
North West region 53w
Political activities 704–6w

Regional government
Eastern region 62–4w
North East region 14

Regional planning and development
546w
Research 70w

Reid, Rt Hon Dr John*, *Minister for Transport, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 919–20, 934, 944–5, 947, 962–6
Questions
Bus services 51w
Bus services, Clitheroe 13–4
Bus services, Ministers 17
Bus services, Passengers 17
Bus services, Rural areas 13
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 368–9w
Channel tunnel railway line 411w
Connex Rail, Disabled 15
Exhaust emissions, Testing 408–9w
Fares, Concessions 5–6
Lorries 51–2w, 548–9w
Lorries, Environment protection 7–8
Lorries, Excise duties 7–10, 49w, 52–3w, 547–8w
Lorries, Operating costs 549–50w
Lorries, Subsidies 548w
National Rail Summit 414w
Public transport, Rural areas 55w, 411–2w
Railways 414w
Railways, Expenditure 479w
Railways, Investment 14–5
Train operating companies, Franchises 414w
Transport, Sustainable development 55w
Transport, Working hours 67–8w

Religion
Listed buildings 87–8w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 828, 836
Public footpaths, Motor vehicles (21.04.99) 884
Questions
Additional personal allowance 427w
Housing benefit 150w
Pensions, Widowed people 151w
Self-employed contributions 491w
Social security benefits, Widowed people 151–2w, 154–5w, 280–1w, 331w
Widowed parents' allowance 281–2w

Rendering industry
391–2w
Pigmeat 318–9w

Rented housing
65w

Rents
Council housing 64–5w

Repossession orders
Mortgages 177–82w
Scotland 184–5w

Representation of the People Act 1983
Debates etc.
(19.04.99) 571–2

Rescue services
Ministry of Defence 372w

Residential homes
Bedfordshire 337w

Resignations
European Commission 233w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 485–6w

Restraint techniques
Mental patients 109w, 374w

Retail trade
Dietary supplements 321w

Retirement
Probation officers 658–60w

Review of the Teachers' Pension Scheme Working Group
see Teachers' Pension Scheme Working Group

Rights of audience
676w

Riot control weapons
Export controls 456w
Health hazards 107w
Northern Ireland 537w
Scotland 614w

River Derwent
Flood control 593w, 1027–8

River Thames
Safety 63–4w

River Wye
Navigation 286w

Rivers
Access 65w
Fishing 518–9w

Road haulage industry
see Lorries and Lorry drivers

Road signs
Speed limits 259w

Road traffic
299w, (22.04.99) 1131
Scotland 198w

Road traffic control
Correspondence 77w

Road traffic offences
Probation and aftercare 11–2w

Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (Amendment) Order 1999
Debates etc.
(22.04.99) 1131

Road works
Standard spending assessments 260w

Roads
Accidents 76w, (20.04.99) 818–22
Baldock 369w
Construction 704w
Manchester Airport 16–7
Noise 72–3w
Repairs and maintenance 54w
South East region 369w

Roads Service
see Northern Ireland Roads Service

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 600, 638–40
Speeches, Points of order (14.04.99) 227
Questions
Kosovo, Armed conflict 219
Meat, Hygiene 1034
Milk Marque 674w
Regional development agencies, East Midlands 54w

***Robertson, Rt Hon George**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 663–8
Questions
Armed forces, Balkans 634w
Arms control 47–8w
Arms trade, Yugoslavia 45w
Defence equipment, Gifts and endowments 241–2w
EC common foreign and security policy 563–4w
Internet, Ministry of Defence 45–6w
Iraq, Peace keeping operations 323w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 242w, 323–4w, 631w
Kosovo, Refugees 401w
Kosovo, Territorial Army 561w, 633w
Kosovo, Uranium 43w, 471w, 564w
Kosovo, Warships 401w
NATO 564w
NATO, Nuclear weapons 562–3w
Nuclear weapons, Public expenditure 563w
START Treaty 563w
Trident 564–5w
USA, Ministry of Defence 631w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Defence 559w

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Debates etc.
Housing, Gloucestershire (14.04.99) 189–92, 196
Questions
EC aid 233w
Euro, Business 493w
Excise duties, Motor vehicles 492–3w
Excise duties, Petrol 118w
Exhaust emissions 409w
Fishing, Rivers 518–9w
Food Standards Agency 292w
Grant maintained schools, Finance 431–2w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 506w
Magistrates' courts, Stow-on-the-Wold 429w
Noise, Pollution control 301w
Prisoners on remand 419–20w
Proscribed organisations, Arrests 139–40w
Railway network, Cheltenham 76w
Road works, Standard spending assessments 260w
Roads, Accidents 76w
Schools, Finance 357–8w, 432w
Social security benefits, Personal savings 278–9w
Speech therapy, Pay 113w
Taxation, Euro 588w

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**, Financial Secretary to the Treasury*
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 727, 802–6, 816
Questions
Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99, Treasury 586w
Excise duties, Alcoholic drinks 616w, 618–9w
Excise duties, Cider 329w
Income tax, Pensioners 118–9w

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**—continued*
Millennium compliance, Financial institutions 357–8
National insurance contributions 358–9
Self-employed contributions 358, 619w
Small businesses 325w
Smuggling, Alcoholic drinks 615w

Rochford
Local government finance 18

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 777, 815
Questions
Community health councils, Wales 501w
Primary care groups, Wales 137–8w

***Rooker, Mr Jeff**, Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 991, 1012–3
Questions
Animal products, Export controls 392w
Animal products, Health hazards 393w
Arable area payments scheme 593–4w
Bananas, EC external trade 96–7w, 319w
Beef, Northern Ireland 321w
Bees, Horticulture 674w
Bovine somatotropin, Dairy products 220w
Bovine tuberculosis 292–3w
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 320w, 392w, 672w, 674w
Codex Alimentarius Commission 294w
Common agricultural policy 391w
Common agricultural policy, Herefordshire 217w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 593w
Common agricultural policy, Staffordshire 217w
Common agricultural policy, Sugar 217w
Dairy Industry Federation 220w
Dairy products, New Zealand 295–6w
Dietary supplements 293–4w
Dietary supplements, Retail trade 321w
EC Scientific Committee for Food 295w
Food, Safety 320w, 672–3w, 1033–4
Food Advisory Committee 220w
Food Advisory Committee, EC Scientific Committee for Food 221w
Food Standards Agency 218w, 292w, 672w, 1038–9
Food Standards Agency, Farmers 291–2w, 394w
Food Standards Agency, Fees and charges 218w, 672w, 1037–40
Food Standards Draft Bill Select Committee 1038
Genetically modified organisms 392w
Genetically modified organisms, Brazil 320w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 216–7w, 321w, 394–6w
Genetically modified organisms, Departmental responsibilities 594w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 221w, 394w, 673w
Genetically modified organisms, Honey 321w
Genetically modified organisms, Maize 515–6w
Genetically modified organisms, USA 291w
Integrated administration and control system 290–1w, 318w, 390w
Licensing, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 319w
Livestock industry, USA 393–4w
Meat, Hygiene 1034
Meat, Inspections 1034–5

Rooker, Mr Jeff—continued
Meat Hygiene Service, Fees and charges 223–4w, 445w, 1035
Meat products, Waste disposal 674w
Milk, Imports 321–2w
Organic farming 445w
Pesticides, Insects 516w
Pesticides, Research 516–7w
Pesticides, Waste disposal 519–20w
Pigmeat 391–2w
Pigmeat, Catering 394w
Pigmeat, Imports 518w
Pigmeat, Rendering industry 318–9w
Potatoes, USA 296w
Quarantine 215w
Quarantine, Guide dogs 219w
Seeds, Certification 518w
Set-aside schemes 515w
Slaughterhouses 218–9w
Slaughterhouses, Animal welfare 519w
Slaughterhouses, Monmouthshire 1035
Suckler cow premiums 445–6w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 393w
Veterinary medicine, Drugs 295w
Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Expert Group 216w, 293w, 295w
Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Expert Group, Business interests 293w
Vitamin B6 294w, 320w, 445w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Questions
Housing benefit, Abuse 457–8w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 690–1

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 748, 759–63, 805
Questions
Crimes of violence, Northern Ireland 144w, 536–7w
Ethnic groups 386w
Fish diseases, Scotland 572–3w
Fishing, Scotland 574w, 701–2w
Lorries 548–9w
Lorries, Excise duties 9, 547–8w
Lorries, Operating costs 549w
Lorries, Subsidies 548w
Northern Ireland Roads Service 470w
Pesticides, Insects 516w
Pesticides, Research 516–7w
Salmon, Scotland 573–4w
Sandeels, Research 517w
Seals 517w
Seals, Scotland 702w

Rotherham
Planning permission 549w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 705, 756
Questions
Children in care 104w
EC aid 233w

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Questions
St Helena, British citizenship 694

Roy, Mr Frank
Questions
Winter fuel payments 563–4

Royal Armoured Corps
373w

Royal Auxiliary Air Force
Deployment 723w

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children
700w

Royal College of Midwives
Conferences 542w

Royal Commission on Long-term Care
see Long-Term Care Royal Commission

Royal Naval Hospital Haslar
47w

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital
Radiotherapy 108w

Ruane, Mr Chris
Questions
Death rate, Wales 498w
Long term unemployed, Wales 499w
Pensioners, Personal income 592w
Teenage pregnancy, Wales 497–8w
Young offenders, Wales 657–8w

Ruddock, Joan
Debates etc.
Railway stations, Disabled (14.04.99) 181–5
Questions
Connex Rail, Disabled 15

Ruffley, Mr David
Questions
NHS, Pensions 654w

Rural action initiative
549–50w

Rural areas
Bus services 13
Public transport 55w, 411–2w
Scotland 173–4w

Russell, Bob
Questions
Bus Employees' Superannuation Trust 58w, 119–20w
Food Standards Agency, Fees and charges 672w
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 665–6w
Ministerial policy advisors 897
Prisons, Essex 317w
St Helena, British citizenship 693–4
Skin piercing 483w

Russell, Ms Christine
Questions
New deal for disabled people 559

Sainsbury of Turville, Lord
Dept of Trade and Industry 707w
Peers' interests 446–8w

St Aubyn, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1151–4, 1161–2, 1171, 1177–8, 1186, 1194–5
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 759, 763, 765, 786, 813–6
Questions
Local government, Ethics 53w
Withholding tax 364–5

St Helena
British citizenship 693–4
Electricity generation 38w

Sale West Race Course estate
412w

Salmon
Genetically modified organisms 525w, 627w
Scotland 525w, 573–4w

Salter, Mr Martin
Questions
Business questions 1050
Home Office, Business plans 420w
Independent Commissioner for the Holding Centres, Annual reports 699w

Sanctions
Iraq 509w
Libyan Arab Republic 503–4w, 512–3w

Sandeels
Research 517w

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Debates etc.
Mobile homes (21.04.99) 851–3
Questions
Assisted areas 367w
Council housing, Rents 64–5w
Council tax 476w
Council tax capping 410w
Disaster relief, Non-governmental organisations 471w
Fares, Concessions 6
Kosovo, Disaster relief 471w
Water companies 476w

Sarwar, Mr Mohammad
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 732–4
Questions
Beta-interferon, Scotland 200–1w
Breast cancer, Scotland 202w
Foreign investment in UK, Glasgow 199–200w
Heart diseases, Scotland 201w
Police, Ethnic groups 198–9w
Police, Training 202w

Satellites
EC action 12w
Fishing vessels 221–2w

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 644, 649
Speeches, Points of order (22.04.99) 1059
Questions
Business questions 1054

Sawford, Mr Phil
Questions
Administration of justice, EC action 510w
Occupational pensions 465w
Pigmeat, Rendering industry 318–9w
Taxation, Pesticides 328w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Ambulance services, Bedfordshire 337w
Biggleswade Hospital 269w, 528–9w, 539w
Bus services, Bedfordshire 76w
Economic and monetary union 2–3w, 403–4w
Food, Safety 320w
Health services, Standards 539w
Hospitals, Bedfordshire 337w
Hospitals, Catering 538w
Individual savings accounts 362–3
Institutional care, Bedfordshire 376w
Kosovo, Refugees 421–2w
Livestock industry, USA 393–4w
Personal savings 615–6w
Pigmeat 391–2w
Pigmeat, Catering 394w
Residential homes, Bedfordshire 337w
Spectacles, Children 538w

Schengen Agreement
24w, 258w

Schizophrenia
650w

***Schizophrenia**—continued*
Wales 288w

"School Admissions Code of Practice (Draft)"
(14.04.99) 345

School meals
Derbyshire 167–8w

Schools
Catering 168w
Finance 172w, 356–8w, 432w, 717w
Gaelic language 362–3w
Middlesbrough 166w
Scotland 213–5w
Sportsgrounds 163w
Textbooks 210–2w, 343w

Science
Curriculum 165w

Science enterprise challenge
453–4w

Scotland
Administration of justice 189–90w
Beta-interferon 200–1w
Breast cancer 202w
Breast feeding 194–5w
Caesarean sections 193w
Capital Modernisation Fund 310w
Child minding 196–7w
Class sizes 183w, 282w
Closed circuit television 203–4w
Crime prevention 207–8w
Criminal proceedings 190w
Drug treatment and testing orders 202w
Drug treatment centres 202w
EC grants and loans 208–10w, 570–1w
Education 177w
Fish diseases 572–3w
Fisheries 215–6w
Fishing 574w, 701–2w
Fishing vessels 229w
Greenbelt 195–6w
Heart diseases 201w
HIV infection 575w
Inland waterways 221
Institutional care 570w
Local authorities 175–6w
Local government services 525w
Maternity services 193w
Mortgage relief 121w
Mortgages 177–82w
Opinion polls 212w
Out-patients 191–3w
Overseas trade 176–7w
Pharmacy 571–2w
Police 198–9w, 202–3w, 205–7w
Primary education 182–3w, 310w
Prison accommodation 207w
Prison sentences 204–5w
Prisoners 206–7w
Prisons 203w
Public opinion 212–3w
Radioactive materials 188–9w
Repossession orders 184–5w
Riot control weapons 614w
Road traffic 198w
Rural areas 173–4w
Salmon 525w, 573–4w
Schools 213–5w
Seals 702w
Subsidies 573–4w
Sustainable development 282–4w
Textbooks 210–2w
Tree planting 614w
Wood 183–4w, 569–70w

Scottish health boards
Expenditure 190–1w

Scottish Office
Advertising 283–4w

***Scottish Office**—continued*
Advisory bodies 524–5w
EC grants and loans 197–8w
Environmental impact assessment 195w
Food and Agriculture Organisation 572w
Market research 174–6w
Performance appraisal 185–8w
Proof of identity 190w
Public appointments 309–10w
Small businesses 183w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 366w
Treaty of Amsterdam 309w
Written questions 309w

Scottish Office Home Dept
284w

Scottish Parliament
Buildings 184w

Scout Association
Vetting 585w

Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) (Amendment) Bill (HL) 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (16.04.99) 542

Seals
517w
Scotland 702w

Secondary education
Havering 713–4w
Pupils 695w

Secondment
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 546–7w
Dept of Trade and Industry 450–1w

Security
Developing countries 236–7w

Seeds
Certification 518w

Select committee reports
Sierra Leone 35–6w, 404w
Social Security Select Committee 157w
Treasury 122–3w

Self-assessment of tax
Wye Valley 614–6w

Self-employed contributions
358, 491w, 619w

Sellafield
Mixed oxide fuel 76–7w

Serbia
Foreign relations 611–2w
Mahon, Alice 905
Nuclear weapons 217

Serious Fraud Office
609w

Set-aside schemes
515w

Severe disablement allowance
592w

Sewers
79w
Pest control 79–80w
Standards 79w

Sex
Health education 530w

Sexual Offences (Anonymity of Defendents) Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (16.04.99) 542

Shares
Credit unions 619–20w

Sheep
Exports 1036

Sheep meat
Common agricultural policy 217w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Questions
Banks, Fees and charges 605w
EC institutions 507w
Economic situation 355
Food Standards Agency 672w
Food Standards Draft Bill Select Committee 1038
Government departments, Telephone services 601w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 744–8, 751

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Questions
Lorries, Excise duties 9–10

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Questions
Immunity certificates 727w

Shipbuilding
Kvaerner Govan 218

Shipbuilding Intervention Fund
605w

Shipping
Drunkenness 63–4w
Taxation 366–7

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**, Secretary of State for International Development*
Questions
Albania, Overseas aid 576w
Arms trade, Export controls 123w
Cambodia, Overseas aid 576w
Caribbean, Overseas aid 232–3w
Developing countries, Debts written off 214–6, 236w, 420–1w
Developing countries, Genetically modified organisms 210–2
Developing countries, Microcredit programmes 234w
Developing countries, Primary education 237–8w
Developing countries, Security 236–7w
Developing countries, Trade 235w
Disaster relief, Non-governmental organisations 471w
EC aid 233w
Environmental impact assessment, Dept for International Development 124w
European Commission, Resignations 233w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept for International Development 126–7w
Heavily indebted poor countries initiative 216
India 234–5w
Inter-American Development Bank, Poverty 233–4w
International Labour Organisation, World Trade Organisation 231w
International Monetary Fund, Education 232w
Jubilee 2000 215
Kosovo, Disaster relief 471w
Kosovo, Overseas aid 232w
Kosovo, Refugees 128w, 421–2w, 576w, 701w
Lobbying, Dept for International Development 123–4w
Non-governmental organisations, Overseas aid 123w
Overseas aid 232w, 236w
Overseas aid, Accountability 208

Short, Rt Hon Clare*—*continued
Overseas aid, Education 235–6w
Public appointments, Dept for International Development 317–8w
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 231w
Sri Lanka, Non-governmental organisations 126w
Statistics, Dept for International Development 577w
UNESCO, Poverty 235w
USAID, Dept for International Development 576w
Written questions, Dept for International Development 317w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 207, 235w
Zimbabwe, Poverty 207–8

Shorthold tenancies
476–7w

Sick leave
Armed forces 371w
Legal Aid Board 603w
Maghaberry Prison 469–70w

Siemens Business Services
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 664w

Sierra Leone
Human rights 568w
Overseas aid 35w, 231w
Select committee reports 35–6w, 404w

Sight impaired
Voting methods 418w

Simpson, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 618
Questions
Alternative medicine, Side effects 542w
Arms trade, Indonesia 263w
Business questions 380
Defence equipment, Gifts and endowments 241–2w
Developing countries, Genetically modified organisms 211–2
Export credit guarantees 552w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 301–2w, 702–3w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 83–4w
GJW Government Relations, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 415w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 323–4w
Private finance initiative, Planning 410–1w
Secondment, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 546–7w
Secondment, Dept of Trade and Industry 450–1w

Simpson, John
Kosovo 901–2

Simpson, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 147–8
Questions
Air force, Deployment 723–4w
Armed forces, Balkans 634w
Armed forces, Deployment 632–3w, 722w
Army, Deployment 724w
Kosovo, Territorial Army 633w
Navy, Deployment 723w
Royal Auxiliary Air Force, Deployment 723w

Singh, Mr Marsha
Questions
Developing countries, Tobacco 337w
Social security benefits, Disabled 456w

Single benefit gateway
New deal for young people 523w, 677–8w
New deal schemes 159–60w

Single market action plan
613–4w

Single parents
see Lone parents

Sites of special scientific interest
11–2, (14.04.99) 161–80

Skilled workers
Shortages 900

Skin piercing
482–3w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Questions
Coalfields Task Force, Regional aid 368–70
Conservative Party, Contributions 224

Skyline College
Censorship 253w

Slaughterhouses
218–9w
Animal welfare 519w
Monmouthshire 1035

Slovakia
Visas 37–8w

Small Business Service
Operating costs 552w

Small businesses
325w
Better Regulation Task Force 903–4
Capital allowances 427w
Debts 453w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 81–3w
Economic and monetary union 327–8w, 367
Pay 427–8w
Scottish Office 183w
Taxation 354
Wales 500w

***Smith, Rt Hon Andrew**, Minister for Employment and Disability Rights, Dept for Education and Employment*
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1060–7, 1069, 1073, 1125
Questions
Education, Expenditure 162w
Employment schemes, Older workers 556w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept for Education and Employment 381w
Jobcentres, Minimum wage 169–70w
New deal for young people 169–70w, 253–4w, 355w, 432–4w, 677–8w, 717–8w
New deal for young people, Complaints 557w
New deal for young people, Qualifications 170w
New deal for young people, Single benefit gateway 523w, 677–8w
New deal for young people, Vocational training 255w
New deal schemes, Greater London 163–4w
New deal schemes, Single benefit gateway 159–60w
New deal schemes, Telephone services 159w
New deal schemes, Training 715–7w
Postal workers, Vacancies 253w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept for Education and Employment 381w

Smith, Angela
Debates etc.
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 399–400, 422–6, 428

Smith, Angela*—*continued
Questions
Business questions 381, 1056
Children in care 113–4w

***Smith, Rt Hon Chris**, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Advisory bodies, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 84–7w
Demonstrations, Parliament Square 27–8w
EC budget, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 84w
Environmental impact assessment, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 89w
Ethnic groups, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 305w
Lobbying, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 88w
Millennium landmark projects 481w, 637w
Museums and galleries, Educational visits 81w
Public appointments, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 634–7w
Small businesses, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 81–3w
Transport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 84w
Treaty of Amsterdam, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 481–2w
Visits abroad, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 577w
Written questions, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 482w

Smith, Miss Geraldine
Questions
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 627–8w

Smith, Jacqui
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 916–7
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 712, 717, 722
Questions
Advisory services, Redditch 894–5
Bus services 51w
Negligence 529w

Smith, Mr John
Questions
Medical examinations 457w

Smith, Mr Llew
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 577
Questions
Alternative energy, Northern Ireland 360w
Alternative energy, Wales 287–8w
Arms trade, Yugoslavia 45w
Internet, Ministry of Defence 45–6w
Kosovo, Uranium 564w
Millennium Exhibition, Environment protection 272–3w
NATO, Nuclear weapons 562–3w
Nuclear disarmament 568–9w
Nuclear weapons, Public expenditure 563w
Radioactive materials, Waste disposal 77w
Radioactive wastes 706–7w
Sellafield, Mixed oxide fuel 76–7w
Serbia, Foreign relations 611–2w
START Treaty 563w
Tillery Valley Foods, Trade union recognition 905

Smith, Sir Robert
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 775, 798, 801
Health Care and Energy Efficiency Bill, 2R adjourned (23.04.99) 1203–5
Questions
Children, Hamilton 204w
Closed circuit television, Scotland 203–4w

***Smith, Sir Robert**—continued*
Crime prevention, Scotland 207–8w
Drug treatment and testing orders, Scotland 202w
Police, Ethnic groups 199w
Police, Finance 205–6w
Police, Scotland 203w, 207w
Prison accommodation, Scotland 207w
Prison sentences, Scotland 204–5w
Prisoners, Scotland 206–7w
Prisons, Drugs 203w
Proof of identity, Dept for Education and Employment 165–6w
Proof of identity, Scottish Office 190w
Scottish Office Home Dept 284w

Smoke alarms
15–6w
Council housing 61–2w

Smuggling
Alcoholic drinks 615w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1060, 1094, 1098–101
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 88–90
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 827
Questions
Business questions 376, 1049
Peru, Prisoners' release 407w

Snape, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 947, 956–9

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 29, (19.04.99) 593–4
Questions
Business questions 1051–2
Kosovo, Armed conflict 906–7
Middle East, Peace negotiations 691–2

Social Exclusion Unit
Teenage pregnancy 424w, 702w

Social Fund
Applications 565–6

Social security
EC action 553
Reform 461w

Social security appeal tribunals
Public appointments 148–9w

Social security benefits
561
Abuse 276–7w, 458–9w, 520–1w, 556–8, 567–8, 708–9w
Carers 564
Disabled 158w, 456w, 555, 566, 709–10w
Lone parents (23.04.99) 1212–6
Mentally ill 556
Pensioners 521–2w
Personal savings 278–9w
Post offices 153–4w, 639–40w
Widowed people 151–2w, 154–5w, 280–1w, 331w

Social Security Benefits Agency
Performance related pay 708w

Social Security Commissioners
32w

Social Security Contributions Agency
Computers 591w

Social Security Select Committee
Select committee reports 157w

Social services
Investment 424w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 29, (19.04.99) 584, 640–3
Questions
Kosovo 225
New deal for disabled people 523w

Solicitors
Limited liability 533w

Solvents
Health hazards 479w

South Africa
Elections 341w

South East region
Roads 369w

Southworth, Ms Helen
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1095–8

Spain
Foreign relations 305–6w

Speaker and deputies
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (13.04.99) 38, (14.04.99) 230, (21.04.99) 915, 974
Conduct of proceedings (13.04.99) 54, 57–8, 60, 72, 79, 88, 92, 94, 112, (14.04.99) 160, 180, 188, 197, 214, 221, 223, 225, 280, 291, 303, 334–6, 343–4, (15.04.99) 361, (16.04.99) 471, 481, 519, (19.04.99) 592, 597, 626, 640, 643, 646, 651, 669, (20.04.99) 705, 717, 721, 815–6, (21.04.99) 844, 864–5, 870, 910, 918, 926, 929, 952, 957, 962, 975, 998–9, (22.04.99) 1051–2, 1075, 1078, (23.04.99) 1181, 1189–91
Orders and regulations motions (14.04.99) 345, (20.04.99) 816–7, (22.04.99) 1131
Points of order (13.04.99) 34, 40, 46, 51, (14.04.99) 227, 283–4, (15.04.99) 459, (16.04.99) 490, 541, (19.04.99) 580, 599–600, (20.04.99) 698, 815, (21.04.99) 909, 920, 959, 964, (22.04.99) 1058–9, (23.04.99) 1178
Private Members' bill orders (16.04.99) 541
Rulings and statements, Fifteen minutes rule (14.04.99) 230
Rulings and statements, Jones, Fiona (19.04.99) 571–2
Rulings and statements, Pinochet, Augusto (23.04.99) 1139
Rulings and statements, Ten minutes rule (13.04.99) 38, (19.04.99) 573

Spectacles
Children 538w

Speech therapy
Pay 113w

Speed limits
Cameras 618w
Lake Windermere 415w
Publicity 473–4w
Road signs 259w

***Spellar, Mr John**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence*
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 634
World War II, Monuments (21.04.99) 878–81
Questions
Army, Food 562w
Building and Property Group, Contracts 48–9w

***Spellar, Mr John**—continued*
Building and Property Group, Vetting 240w, 722w
Defence Council, Disclosure of information 471–2w
Defence Estate Organisation 632w
Defence Export Services Organisation 724w
EH101 helicopters 47w
Environmental impact assessment, Ministry of Defence 42w
Horizon project 399w
Housing, Ministry of Defence 323w
Meteorological Office 48w
Military exercises, Turkey 240w
Millennium compliance, Ministry of Defence 242–3w
Minesweepers 46w
Performance appraisal, Ministry of Defence 398w
Public appointments, Ministry of Defence 324w
Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserves Association 565–6w
Type 23 frigates 44w
Weather 398–9w
Written questions, Ministry of Defence 324w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Questions
Kingshurst Parish Council 77w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 721, 748–55
Questions
Withholding tax 220–1

Sponsorship
Millennium Exhibition 577–8w

Sport England
see English Sports Council

Sports
Disabled 87w
National Lottery 275w

Sportsgrounds
Schools 163w

Spring, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 156–8
Questions
English Sports Council, National Lottery 89–90w
Sports, National Lottery 275w

Squash
578w

Sri Lanka
Arms trade 262w
Non-governmental organisations 126w

Staffordshire
Common agricultural policy 217w
Heart diseases 527–8w

Stakeholder pensions
520w

Stamp duties
Stocks and shares 617w

Standard spending assessments
Road works 260w

Standing orders
National Assembly for Wales 290w

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 26
Questions
Sierra Leone, Select committee reports 404w

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 52
Kosovo (13.04.99) 28–9, (19.04.99) 599
Questions
Small businesses 325w
Social security benefits, Disabled 555

START Treaty
563w

State earnings related pension scheme
149–50w
Widowed people 460w

State retirement pensions
460w

Statistics
331w
Cabinet Office 601–2w
Dept for Education and Employment 713–4w
Dept for International Development 577w
Dept of Social Security 707–8w
Home Office 582–3w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 604w
Northern Ireland Office 537–8w
Treasury 726–7w
Welsh Office 729w

Statutory sick pay
Armed forces 371–2w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
Fisheries, Scotland 215–6w
Fishing vessels 220w
Fishing vessels, Inspections 222w
Fishing vessels, Satellites 221–2w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 56w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Uranium 372–3w
Teachers, Pay 161–2w

Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry
Attorney General 397w
Cabinet Office 239–40w
Church Commissioners 407–8w
Dept for Education and Employment 430–1w
Dept for International Development 125–6w
Dept of Health 647w
Dept of Social Security 521w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 408w
Dept of Trade and Industry 551w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 510–1w
Home Office 416w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 391w
Ministry of Defence 325w
Northern Ireland Office 361–2w, 467–9w
President of the Council 466–7w
Scottish Office 366w
Treasury 428w, 497w
Welsh Office 597w

Steppingley Hospital
269w, 528–9w, 539w

Stewart, Mr Ian
Questions
Pertussis vaccine 539–40w
Railways, Freight 77w

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 305–7
Questions
Animal products, Export controls 392w
Animal products, Health hazards 393w

Stinchcombe, Mr Paul*—*continued
Bovine tuberculosis 292–3w

Stoate, Dr Howard
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 45, 50–1, 98–102
Questions
Berlin Summit 506w

Stocks and shares
Local authorities (22.04.99) 1131
Stamp duties 617w

Stop and search
Hammersmith and Fulham 21w

Stow-on-the-Wold
Magistrates' courts 429w

Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin,
Questions
HIV infection, Scotland 575w
HIV infection, Screening 645–7w

Strasbourg
224w

Strategic Communications Unit
306w

Strategic Rail Authority
67w

***Straw, Rt Hon Jack**, Secretary of State for the Home Dept*
Debates etc.
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 385–95, 399, 412
Questions
Advisory bodies, Home Office 310–2w
British citizenship, Ceremonies 485w
Consultation papers, Home Office 417w
Criminal Justice Act 1993 583w
Electronic surveillance, EC action 418w
Ethnic groups, Home Office 4–5w
Firearms, Training 585w
Home Office, Business plans 420w
Kosovo Liberation Army, Surveillance 417–8w
Lobbying, Home Office 14w
Pinochet, Augusto 311–6w, 419w
Public appointments, Home Office 655–6w
Refugees, Kosovo 640w, 669w, 711–2w
Statistics, Home Office 582–3w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry, Home Office 416w
Terrorism 661–2w
Transsexualism 257w
USA, Home Office 417w
Written questions, Home Office 316w

Streeter, Mr Gary
Questions
Kosovo, EC aid 214

Streetworks Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R order read (23.04.99) 1210

Stringer, Mr Graham
Questions
Bus services, Passengers 629–30w
MMR vaccine 654–5w
Regional airports 630w
Secondary education, Pupils 695w
Social security benefits, Abuse 458w
Working families tax credit 326w

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Debates etc.
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 146
Questions
Social security benefits, Abuse 557–8, 567–8

Stuart-Smith Inquiry
see Hillsborough Stadium Evidence Inquiry

Student numbers
Herefordshire 171w, 558w
Open University 557w

Study of Parliament Group
303w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
Questions
Credit unions 120w
Double glazing, Regulation 3
Education, Temporary immigrants 254w
Gazumping 65w
Hepatitis 108w
HIV infection 538–9w
Immigration, Latvia 44w
International Monetary Fund, Education 232w
Rivers, Access 65w
Speed limits, Publicity 473–4w
Speed limits, Road signs 259w
Taxation, Alternative energy 332w

Subsidiarity
406w

Suckler cow premiums
445–6w

Suffolk
NHS 654w

Sugar
Common agricultural policy 217w

Summertime
24w

Supermarkets
262–3w
Wales 289w

Sure start programme
Derbyshire 164w

Surveillance
Kosovo Liberation Army 417–8w

Sustainable development
Scotland 282–4w
Transport 55w

Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 231, 247, 299–301
Excise duties (21.04.99) 935–6, 940
Questions
BBC External Services, Finance 510w
Railways, Freight 52w

Sutherland Commission
see Long-Term Care Royal Commission

Swayne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 927, 939, 949, 955
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 981
Questions
Cooperatives, Dairy farming 94w
Local authorities, Public relations 175–6w
New Forest 6–7
New Forest Foxhounds 514–5w
Pensions 570
Perjury, Convictions 662w
Refugees, Kosovo 669w
Scottish health boards, Expenditure 190–1w
Sustainable development, Scotland 282–4w
Untreated milk 451w

Swaziland
Females 127w

Swindon
Railway network 76w

Swinney, Mr John
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 232
Kosovo (19.04.99) 609–12
Questions
EC grants and loans, Scotland 208–10w
Rural areas, Scotland 173–4w

Syms, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL), 2R (15.04.99) 426–8
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 320w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 673w
Hospitals, Waiting lists 103–4w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 601–3
Questions
Official engagements 597w

Task forces
Economic and monetary union 403w, 500–1w
Euro 495w

Tattooing
483w

Tax allowances
Maintenance 329w, 616–7w

Tax burden
121w, 329–30w
Transport 328w

Tax credit
Income tax 330w
Pensioners 118w

Tax exemption certificates
122w

Tax rates and bands
Income tax 121w, 387w

Tax yields
327w

Taxation
(20.04.99) 703–816
Alternative energy 332w
Business 353–4
Construction 365–6
Disclosure of information (20.04.99) 699–702
Energy 361–2
Environment protection 726w
Euro 588w
Females 329w
Information technology 366
Leaflets 588w
Motor vehicles 359
Pesticides 328w
Pollution control 725w
Poverty 328w
Shipping 366–7
Small businesses 354

Taylor, Ms Dari
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 918
Questions
Millennium compliance, Publicity 480–1w

Taylor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Community Protection (Landfill) Bill, 1R (13.04.99) 35–7
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 792
Questions
East Timor 684–5
National Forest, Railways 223

Taylor, Mr David*—*continued
Schools, Textbooks 343w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 27

Taylor, Rt Hon John D
Questions
Liver diseases, Northern Ireland 700w

Taylor, Mr John M
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 251–2, 262–3, 283, 291–4
Questions
Census, Correspondence 676–7w
Census, Disclosure of information 588–90w, 677w
Crown Prosecution Service, Freemasonry 4w
Duty solicitors 676w
Manpower, Dept for Education and Employment 558w
Rights of audience 676w
Taxation, Business 353

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Education, Finance (21.04.99) 862–9, 873
Questions
Defence Council, Disclosure of information 471–2w
Exercise Dimming Sun 722w
Genetically modified organisms 541–2w
Nuclear fuel reprocessing, Japan 451–2w
Police Scientific Development Branch, Publications 486–8w
Riot control weapons, Northern Ireland 537w
Riot control weapons, Scotland 614w
USA, Dept for Education and Employment 558w
USA, Dept of Social Security 707w
USA, Dept of Trade and Industry 503w
USA, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 567w
USA, Home Office 417w
USA, Ministry of Defence 631w
USAID, Dept for International Development 576w
World heritage sites, Atlantic Ocean 706w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Questions
Local government finance, Rochford 18
Pensioners 461w
Road traffic control, Correspondence 77w

Teachers
165w
Ethnic groups 162–3w
Pay 161–2w, 165w, 344w
Training 559w
Wales 285w

Teachers' Pension Scheme Working Group
167w

Teenage pregnancy
246–7w
Social Exclusion Unit 424w, 702w
Wales 497–8w

Telephone services
Government departments 601w
Immigration and Nationality Directorate 5–6w, 663w
New deal schemes 159w

Television
Disability aids 89w
Licensing 89w

Temporary immigrants
Education 254w

10 Downing Street
306w

Ten minutes rule
Rulings and statements (13.04.99) 38, (19.04.99) 573

Territorial Army
42w, 400–1w
Kosovo 561w, 633w

Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserves Association
565–6w

Terrorism
661–2w

Textbooks
Schools 210–2w, 343w
Scotland 210–2w

Theft
Firearms 584–5w

Thomas, Mr Gareth
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 247, 313–4
Questions
Bus services, Rural areas 13

Thomas, Mr Gareth R
Debates etc.
Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Bill, 2R (23.04.99) 1181–4, 1189–90

Thompson, Mr William
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 1005
Questions
Animal welfare 1032
Weapons, Northern Ireland 220

Tillery Valley Foods
Trade union recognition 905

Timms, Mr Stephen, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 841–4
Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, Money res (14.04.99) 339–42, 344
Questions
Annuities 592w
Benefit Fraud Inspectorate 153w
Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, Manpower 149w
Complaints, Dept of Social Security 384w
Disabled, Dept of Social Security 385w
Housing benefit 150w
Housing benefit, Abuse 457–8w
Means tested benefits 553–4
Means tested benefits, Applications 561
Occupational pensions 279–80w, 465w
Pensioners 155w, 461w
Pensioners, Income support 521w
Pensioners, Investment income 156w
Pensioners, Means tested benefits 156–7w, 554, 560–1
Pensioners, Personal income 592w, 640w
Pensioners, Social security benefits 521–2w
Pensions 151w, 279w, 385–6w, 562–3, 568–70
Pensions, Advisory services 279w
Pensions, Reform 157w
Pensions, Widowed people 151w
Public appointments, Dept of Social Security 308–9w
Social security, Reform 461w
Social security benefits 561
Social security benefits, Abuse 276–7w, 458–9w, 520–1w, 567–8, 708–9w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Performance related pay 708w
Stakeholder pensions 520w

Timms, Mr Stephen*—*continued
Standards, Dept of Social Security 384w
State earnings related pension scheme 149–50w
State earnings related pension scheme, Widowed people 460w
State retirement pensions 460w
Statistics, Dept of Social Security 707–8w
USA, Dept of Social Security 707w
Written questions, Dept of Social Security 308w

Tipping, Mr Paddy*, *Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office
Questions
Study of Parliament Group 303w

Tipping of waste
Environment protection (13.04.99) 35–7

Tobacco
Developing countries 337w
Excise duties 492w
Prices 491w

Todd, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 272–5
Questions
Drugs, Licensing 109w
Food poisoning 652w
Fuels, Excise duties 299w
Lorries, Environment protection 7–8
Mobile homes 78w
Pharmacy, Pay 114w
Primary education, Per capita costs 380–1w
Slaughterhouses 218–9w
Sure start programme, Derbyshire 164w

Tonge, Dr Jenny
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 44–5
Questions
Animal Procedures Committee, Public appointments 581–2w
Arms trade, Export controls 34w, 123w
Carers, Minimum wage 452w
Contraceptives 424w, 648w
Health education, Sex 530w
Kosovo, EC aid 213
Kosovo, Refugees 567w
Middle East, Peace negotiations 691
Non-governmental organisations, Overseas aid 123w
Social Exclusion Unit, Teenage pregnancy 424w

Trade
Developing countries 235w
Environment protection 551–2w
Internet 555w

Trade promotion
Libyan Arab Republic 503–4w
Ministers 91–2w

Trade union recognition
Tillery Valley Foods 905

Train operating companies
Franchises 414w

Training
Armed forces 632w
Firearms 585w, 631w
Medical profession 902–3
New deal schemes 715–7w
Nurses 422w, 527w
Police 14–5w, 202w
Teachers 559w

Training and enterprise councils
Finance 715w

Trans-European networks
53–4w

Transport
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 84w
Personnel 328w
Sustainable development 55w
Tax burden 328w
Working hours 67–8w

Transsexualism
257w

Treasury
Access to Justice Bill (HL) 1998/99 586w
Capital investment 120w
Crime prevention 244w
Environmental impact assessment 490w, 586w
European Scrutiny Committee 494–5w
KPMG 492w
Lobbying 120w
Official engagements 496w
Performance appraisal 116–7w
Public appointments 493w
Select committee reports 122–3w
Statistics 726–7w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 428w, 497w
Treaty of Amsterdam 727w
Written questions 335w

Treaties
Yugoslavia 612w

Treaty of Amsterdam
403w
Cabinet Office 146–7w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 481–2w
Dept for Education and Employment 381w
Dept for International Development 127–8w
Dept of Health 269w
Dept of Social Security 152w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 75w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 38w, 406w
France 568w
Greece 568w
Home Office 417w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 393w
Northern Ireland Office 359–60w
Scottish Office 309w
Treasury 727w
Welsh Office 286w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Questions
Prisoners, Alternative medicine 257–8w

Tree planting
Scotland 614w

Trend, Mr Michael
Questions
EC enlargement 683

Trickett, Mr Jon
Questions
Middle East, Peace negotiations 508w

Trident
564–5w

Truswell, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 71–4
Licensing (Young Persons) Bill, 2R adjourned (16.04.99) 534
Questions
Environmental impact assessment, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 89w
Environmental impact assessment, Dept for Education and Employment 556w

Truswell, Mr Paul*—*continued
Environmental impact assessment, Dept for International Development 124w
Environmental impact assessment, Dept of Social Security 464w
Environmental impact assessment, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 66w
Environmental impact assessment, Home Office 415w
Environmental impact assessment, Lord Chancellor's Dept 30w
Environmental impact assessment, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 222–3w
Environmental impact assessment, Ministry of Defence 42w
Environmental impact assessment, Northern Ireland Office 145w, 276w
Environmental impact assessment, Scottish Office 195w
Environmental impact assessment, Treasury 586w
Environmental impact assessment, Welsh Office 135–6w
Minimum wage 94w
Teachers, Pay 165w

Turkey
Military exercises 240w

Turner, Dr Desmond
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 48–9, 94–6

Turner, Dr George
Debates etc.
Digital Television Broadcasting Bill, 1R (21.04.99) 910–2
Questions
Trans-European networks 53–4w

Twigg, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Disability Rights Commission Bill, 2R (22.04.99) 1065–6
Questions
General Certificate of Secondary Education, Digital broadcasting 254w
Investment, Dept for Education and Employment 254w
New deal for young people 253–4w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Clerk of the House, Points of order (22.04.99) 1059
Education, Finance (21.04.99) 869–71
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 152–4
Questions
Business questions 373–4, 1047–8
Food Standards Agency, Fees and charges 1037–8
Meat Hygiene Service, Fees and charges 223–4w, 445w

Type 23 frigates
44w

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 703, 718–9, 726, 755, 770, 781–5
Kosovo (19.04.99) 622
Questions
Centre for Management and Policy Studies 147w
Kosovo, Refugees 701w
Visits abroad, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 577w
Visits abroad, Dept for Education and Employment 159w
Visits abroad, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 57w

***Tyrie, Mr Andrew**—continued*
Visits abroad, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 404–5w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 319w
Visits abroad, Ministry of Defence 559w
Visits abroad, Prime Minister 1w
Working hours, Dept of Trade and Industry 92w

Unemployment
247–8w, 335w

UNESCO
Poverty 235w

University Challenge Fund
454w

University for Industry
Environment protection 168–9w

Unleaded petrol
71–2w
Motor vehicles 300w

Untreated milk
451w

Uranium
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 43–4w, 372–3w
Kosovo 43w, 471w, 564w
Storage 454–5w

Urban railways
Grants 67w

Urinary system
Diseases 422w

USA
Capital punishment 383w
Dept for Education and Employment 558w
Dept of Social Security 707w
Dept of Trade and Industry 503w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 567w
Genetically modified organisms 291w
Home Office 417w
Livestock industry 393–4w
Ministry of Defence 631w
Overseas trade 93–4w
Potatoes 296w

USAID
Dept for International Development 576w

VAT
491w
Clothing 588w
Diesel fuel 115–6w
Petrol 115w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 270, 280–4
Questions
Business questions 374–5
Ethnic groups, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 305w
Ethnic groups, Home Office 4–5w
Ethnic groups, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 514w
Ethnic groups, Northern Ireland Office 138–9w
Ethnic groups, Prime Minister 238–9w
Food, Safety 1033–4
Greenbelt 66w
Greenbelt, Northern Ireland 145w
Greenbelt, Scotland 195–6w
Greenbelt, Wales 136w
Public Appointments Commissioner, Recruitment 890–1
Teachers, Ethnic groups 162–3w

Veterinary medicine
Drugs 295w

Vetting
Building and Property Group 240w, 722w
Scout Association 585w

Viagra
527w

Victims' Liaison Unit
Northern Ireland 472–3w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 630–2
Questions
Armed forces, Health services 44–6w, 114w, 566w, 631w, 718–9w
Centre for Defence Medicine 44w
Intensive care, Hampshire 270w
Means tested benefits 553–4
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 47w

Village schools
173w

Violence
Maghaberry Prison 364w

Virdi, Gurpal
Disciplinary proceedings 488–9w

Vis, Dr Rudi
Questions
Training and enterprise councils, Finance 715w

Visas
37w, 695
Bangladesh 695
Fees and charges 694–5
India 37w
Pakistan 695
Slovakia 37–8w

Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Expert Group
216w, 293w, 295w
Business interests 293w

Vitamin B6
294w, 320w, 445w

Vocational training
New deal for young people 255w

Voting methods
Sight impaired 418w

Voucher schemes
Political refugees 667–8w

Wales
Alternative energy 287–8w
Alternative medicine 502w
Assisted areas 285w
Aviation 284w
Beef 599w
Civil servants 338w
Common agricultural policy 696w
Community health councils 501w
Council tax capping 697–8w
Death rate 498w
Dental services 137w, 430w
Depressive illnesses 288w
EC grants and loans 501w
Economic and monetary union 500–1w, 728w
Fares 502–3w
Foreign investment in UK 730w
Greenbelt 136w, 599w
Health authorities 129–33w
Iron and steel 285w
Job creation 502w
Long term unemployed 499w
Mental health services 136–7w, 286–8w, 695–7w
NHS trusts 128–9w
Non-domestic rates 138w, 289w
Nurseries 597w

***Wales**—continued*
Nurses 598w
Out of town shopping centres 597–8w
Planning permission 288–9w
Primary care groups 137–8w, 429–30w
Radioactive wastes 290w
Rain 336w
Schizophrenia 288w
Small businesses 500w
Supermarkets 289w
Teachers 285w
Teenage pregnancy 432–8w
Water supply 289–90w
Wind power 287w
Young offenders 657–8w

Wallace, Mr James
Questions
Advertising, Scottish Office 283–4w
Mortgage relief, Scotland 121w
New Opportunities Fund, Correspondence 397w
Opinion polls, Scotland 212w
Out-patients, Scotland 191–3w
Public opinion, Scotland 212–3w
Schools, Scotland 213–5w
Schools, Textbooks 210–2w

Walley, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 920, 948–52
Football (Offences and Disorder) Bill, 2R (16.04.99) 488–92
Questions
Genetically modified organisms 392w
Genetically modified organisms, Brazil 320w
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 321w, 394–6w
Genetically modified organisms, Honey 321w

Walter, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 74–6
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 989–90
Questions
Beef, Exports 902
Scout Association, Vetting 585w

Wandsworth
Priority routes 64w

War crimes
Kosovo 219, 567–8w, 613w

War pensions
562w, 632w
Hearing impaired 307–8w

Ward, Ms Claire
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 935
Questions
EC enlargement 682–3
Pensions 329w

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 30, (19.04.99) 589, 599–600

Warrington Central Station
Manpower 628–9w

Warships
Kosovo 401w

Waste disposal
Meat products 674w
Packaging 75w
Pesticides 519–20w
Radioactive materials 77w, 188–9w

Water
Meters 475w
Planning 61w

Water charges
624–5w

Water companies
476w
Consumer protection 59w

Water supply
70w
Wales 289–90w

Waterloo Station
Political refugees 670w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 963
Questions
Housing, Construction 78w
New Forest 7
Nurses, Training 527w
Public inquiries, Administrative delays 338–9w
Refugees, Kosovo 488w

Watts, Mr Dave
Questions
Energy, Conservation 625–7w
Regional development agencies, Finance 545–6w

Weapons
Northern Ireland 220

Weather
398–9w

Webb, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Pensioners, Low incomes (21.04.99) 839–41
Questions
Annuities 592w
Child care tax credit 425w
Children, Poverty 244–5w
Fuel poverty, Pensioners 78–9w
Milk, Imports 321–2w
Occupational pensions 279–80w
Pensioners 155w
Pensioners, Investment income 156w
Pensions, Reform 157w
Public transport, Rural areas 55w
Stakeholder pensions 520w

Weed control
Ragwort 220w

Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill 1998/99
Debates etc.
Money res (14.04.99) 333–44

Welfare tax credits
Widowed people 460w

Wellcome Trust
Grants 450w

Wellington Barracks
Electronic warfare 561w

Wells, Mr Bowen
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 653–5
Questions
Developing countries, Bananas 209
Sierra Leone, Overseas aid 231w

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 926, 928
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 983, 990

Welsh Assembly
see National Assembly for Wales

Welsh Office
Advisory bodies 499–500w
Environmental impact assessment 135–6w
Lobbying 500w, 698w
Performance appraisal 133–5w

Welsh Office*—*continued
Public appointments 336w
Public expenditure 135w
Statistics 729w
Stephen Lawrence Death Inquiry 597w
Treaty of Amsterdam 286w
Written questions 336w

West coast railway line
Standards 75w

West Midlands
Incapacity benefit 522w

White, Mr Brian
Questions
Environment protection 692–3
New deal for disabled people 564–5
Roads, Repairs and maintenance 54w

Whitehead, Dr Alan
Questions
Home shopping 54w
New Forest 7
Sewers 79w
Sewers, Pest control 79–80w
Sewers, Standards 79w

Whitney, Sir Ray
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 614–6

Whittingdale, Mr John
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 798–802
Questions
EC budget, Contributions 251–2w, 333–4w
Excise duties, Diesel fuel 115–6w
Excise duties, Fuels 586w
Excise duties, Motor vehicles 545w
Excise duties, Petrol 115w
Excise duties, Tobacco 492w
Excise duties, Tobacco 492w
Tax allowances, Maintenance 616–7w
Tobacco, Prices 491w
VAT 491w
Withholding tax 357

Wicks, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 651–3

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 45–6, 48–57, 100
Questions
NHS, Food Standards Agency 725w
Planning, Inspections 80w, 620w

Widowed parents' allowance
281–2w

Widowed people
Occupational pensions 464–5w
Pensions 151w
Social security benefits 151–2w, 154–5w, 280–1w, 331w
State earnings related pension scheme 460w
Welfare tax credits 460w

Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Questions
Arms control 47–8w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 730w
Foreign relations, Devolution 728w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 394w
Non-domestic rates, Wales 138w, 289w
Planning permission, Wales 288–9w
Poland, Overseas investment 135w
Prisoners, Hepatitis 316–7w
Public expenditure, Welsh Office 135w
Quarantine, Guide dogs 219w
Supermarkets, Wales 289w
Water supply, Wales 289–90w

Wigs
112–3w

Wild animals
Protection 61w

Wild ducks
Pest control 410w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Kosovo (19.04.99) 585, 634–6, 661
Questions
Business questions 378
Chile 695–6
East Timor 685
European Commission, Resignations 233w
Excise duties, Cider 329w
Social security, EC action 553

Willetts, Mr David,
Questions
Monetary Policy Committee 169w
New deal for young people 169w, 717–8w
Teachers' Pension Scheme Working Group 167w

Williams, Mr Alan W
Questions
Lorries, Excise duties 7–8
Taxation, Energy 362

Willis, Mr Phil
Questions
Education, Expenditure 162w
Education action zones 435w
Education action zones, Government departments 435–6w
New deal schemes, Single benefit gateway 159–60w
Roads, Construction 704w
Schools, Finance 717w
Shorthold tenancies 476–7w

***Wills, Mr Michael**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Assisted areas 367w
EC grants and loans 366–7w
Foreign investment in UK, Korea 367w
Information society initiative 453w
Internet, Trade 555w
Millennium compliance, Offshore industry 553–5w
Small Business Service, Operating costs 552w
Small businesses, Debts 453w
Small businesses, Pay 427–8w

Wilshire, Mr David
Questions
Armed forces, Gibraltar 41w
Ashford and St Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, Accident and emergency departments 422–3w
Kosovo, Armed conflict 242w
Lobbying, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 88w
Lobbying, Dept for Education and Employment 170w
Lobbying, Dept for International Development 123–4w
Lobbying, Dept of Health 108w
Lobbying, Dept of Trade and Industry 367–8w
Lobbying, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 34w
Lobbying, Home Office 14w
Lobbying, Lord Chancellor's Dept 29–30w
Lobbying, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 222w
Lobbying, Northern Ireland Office 145w

***Wilshire, Mr David**—continued*
Lobbying, President of the Council 29w
Lobbying, Treasury 120w
Lobbying, Welsh Office 500w
Women's prisons, Ashford 316w

***Wilson, Mr Brian**, Minister for Trade, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
Asbestos, Imports 96w
Bananas, EC external trade 504–5w
European Scrutiny Committee, Dept of Trade and Industry 505w
Export credit guarantees 552w
Export credit guarantees, Angola 94w
Export credit guarantees, Iraq 92–3w
Export credit guarantees, Jordan 553w
Manufacturing industries, Production 555w
Overseas trade, USA 93–4w
Sanctions, Libyan Arab Republic 503–4w
Trade promotion, Libyan Arab Republic 503–4w
Trade promotion, Ministers 91–2w
USA, Dept of Trade and Industry 503w

Wind power
Wales 287w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Kosovo (13.04.99) 26, (19.04.99) 590, 628–30
Parliament, Broadcasting (14.04.99) 142, 150–2
Questions
Business questions 378, 1051
Chile 696
Government departments, Advertising 601w
Members, Correspondence 415w
Social Fund, Applications 565–6
Spain, Foreign relations 305–6w

Winter fuel payments
117–8w, 563–4, 591–2w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Finance Bill, 2R (20.04.99) 710
Questions
Advisory bodies, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 80w
Advisory bodies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 515w
Business questions 375, 1050
Drugs, Health education 559w, 894
Economic and monetary union 327w
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority 450w
Human Genetics Advisory Commission, Conflict of interests 449w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Access to Justice Bill (HL), 2R (14.04.99) 233
Questions
Bananas, EC external trade 96–7w, 319w, 504–5w
Dairy Industry Federation 220w
Drugs, Prosecutions 892–3
Excise duties, Diesel fuel 325w
Excise duties, Lorries 904–5
Food Standards Agency 218w
Manchester Airport, Roads 16
Overseas trade, USA 93–4w

Winterton, Ms Rosie
Debates etc.
Excise duties (21.04.99) 933

Wirral Metropolitan College
172w, 558–9w, 717–8w

Wise, Audrey
Questions
Maternity Services Multidisciplinary Working Party 423w
Multiple sclerosis 376–7w, 423w
Neurology 270w
Neurology, Standards 529w

Withholding tax
220–1, 326w, 357, 364–5, 898–9

Women
see Females

Women's prisons
Ashford 316w

Wood
Scotland 183–4w, 569–70w

Woodstead, Chris
382w

Woodward, Mr Shaun
Questions
Developing countries, Primary education 238w

Woolas, Mr Phil
Questions
Council tax capping 50w
Weather 398–9w

Work permits
431w

Working families tax credit
122w, 326w

Working Group on the Review of the Teachers' Pension Scheme
see Teachers' Pension Scheme Working Group

Working hours
Dept of Trade and Industry 92w
EC law 453–4w
Transport 67–8w

World Bank
Education 232w

World heritage sites
Atlantic Ocean 706w

World Tourism Organisation
Membership 578w

World Trade Organisation
International Labour Organisation 231w

World War II
Monuments (21.04.99) 876–81

Worthington, Mr Tony
Questions
European Commission, EC aid 213–4

Wright, Mr Anthony D
Questions
Flood control, Great Yarmouth 1027

Wright, Dr Tony
Debates etc.
Health Bill (HL), 2R (13.04.99) 55, 90–2
Questions
Advisory bodies, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 84–7w
Advisory bodies, Dept for Education and Employment 163w
Advisory bodies, Dept of Health 271w, 641–2w
Advisory bodies, Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 57–8w
Advisory bodies, Home Office 310–2w
Advisory bodies, Northern Ireland Office 139–41w
Advisory bodies, Scottish Office 524–5w
Advisory bodies, Welsh Office 499–500w
International Criminal Court 510w

***Wright, Dr Tony**—continued*
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration 889
Pigmeat, Imports 217w
Television, Licensing 89w

Written questions
Cabinet Office 339w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 482w
Dept for Education and Employment 343w
Dept for International Development 317w
Dept of Health 337w
Dept of Social Security 308w
Dept of the Environment Transport and the Regions 301w
Dept of Trade and Industry 307w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 342w, 406w
Home Office 316w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 340w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food 322w
Ministry of Defence 324w
Northern Ireland Office 306w
President of the Council 302w
Scottish Office 309w
Treasury 335w
Welsh Office 336w

Wyatt, Derek
Questions
Regional development agencies, Political activities 704–6w

Wye Valley
Self-assessment of tax 614–6w

Wyre Forest
Dental services 725w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Livestock industry (21.04.99) 974–81, 987, 991
Questions
Animal welfare, France 1033
Food Standards Agency 1038–9
Genetically modified organisms, Crops 594w
Genetically modified organisms, Food 239w
Strasbourg 224w

Young, Sir George
Questions
Business statements 371–3, 1045–6
NHS, Pensions 892
Public service 145–6w

Young offenders
Wales 657–8w

Young people
Alcoholic drinks (16.04.99) 534–40
Armed forces 560–1w
Gambling 524w

Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill (HL) 1998/99
Debates etc.
2R and money res* (15.04.99) 385–458

Youth services
170w

Yugoslavia
Arms trade 45w
Political refugees 665w
Treaties 612w

Zimbabwe
Land 207–8
Overseas aid 207, 235w
Poverty 207–8